THE POLITICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF DR. BENJAMIN RUSH

By

Charles Irvin Switzer

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ABSTRACT

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AND RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF
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This study of Rush's political, philosophical, and religious thought stresses the intellectual interplay in its development between the scientific and religious traditions. Utilizing the scientific method and 18th-century concepts of reason and natural law, Rush sought to perfect society, and to create a science of government, morality, religion, and mind. He believed science and Christianity could combine into one system of thought.

Yet ironically the Puritanism in Rush's religious thought, with its pessimistic convictions concerning mankind, failed to harmonize with the utopian aims of his scientific beliefs. The tension between them explains the inconsistency of his thought and his rejection of science for theology as the more trustworthy basis for happiness.

Rush based his political thought on two principles--that sound governmental theory, recognizing man's inherent depravity, provided for its control, and that good government reflected scientific principles by reproducing in its structure the Newtonian pattern for stability and by

encouraging the growth and health of mankind. Since the measure of good government was the physical and mental health of its citizens, political science became a branch of natural history. Using these criteria, he rejected despotic governments because they failed to control human depravity and to apply scientific principles, creating disorder and mental and physical illness. But a republican government succeeded, because it imitated the harmony of the universe, controlled depravity, and encouraged health and longevity in the species.

Rush's philosophy was Jeffersonian because it emphasized empiricism, associationism, and materialism--views derived from his physiological theory of life. Aspects of his philosophy, however, refused to adhere to Jeffersonian thought. Influenced by Calvinism, he retained deterministic views in contrast to Jeffersonian free will, and eventually rejected a physiology of morals for Christian morality. Moreover, he alternated between monistic materialism and a dualism of mind and matter, liberty and necessity. He qualified his empiricism, by preferring theory to empiricism and by considering the existence of an intuitive mental faculty. He also gradually developed a skeptical fideism that rejected rationalism, denied progress, repudiated the scientific emphasis of the Enlightenment, and envisioned a millennium based on Christian faith.

Rush's religious creed contained many orthodox and

heterodox principles, unified by the doctrine of universal salvation and restitution. Convinced that science and religion were compatible, Rush utilized natural history and medicine to explain theology and Scripture. But his vision of a natural history of religion and morals gradually faded, although scientific analysis seemed to illuminate many of his religious principles. Disillusioned by failure in his humanitarian activities, he finally rejected science and reason for religious fideism, grounding Christian morality solely on Biblical faith.

Threading through his religious, philosophical, and political thought, then, was an interaction of science and religion that explained the contradictions in his thought. Sometimes he synthesized opposites, as in his universalism and republican theories, but frequently incongruity and dissonance remained, especially in his philosophical beliefs.

The clash between science and religion in Rush's thought was a manifestation of the conflict between two intellectual traditions in America--the Enlightenment and the Puritan heritage. Complicating the milieu of the Revolutionary Age was the rise of romanticism, following closely the impact of rationalism. Out of these conflicting ideas Rush eclectically built his philosophy. To consider his Jeffersonian thought exclusively, therefore, is to understand only those ideas he repudiated for religious fideism. A full comprehension of his thought requires an understanding of all aspects of his mind.

Perhaps the greatest paradox revealed by this study is the irony of the reformer who believed society could be improved moving toward skepticism, losing faith in reason, science, and man, finally believing only God could better society.

PREFACE

I am indebted to the staff of the Michigan State University Library for their assistance in making available the primary and secondary sources used in preparing this study. I owe a debt to Drs. C. David Mead and John A. Yunck for reading the dissertation and making helpful comments. I am especially grateful to Dr. Yunck, whose study of Jonathan Swift's skeptical fideism gave me several suggestions for my analysis of Benjamin Rush's skepticism. My greatest debt of gratitude is to Dr. Russel B. Nye, whose seminar in the Revolutionary Age led me to this study of Rush's thought and whose The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 provided me with countless insights into Rush's milieu. As my major professor, Dr. Nye made available many materials for my research and guided me throughout the study, making innumerable suggestions for improving its content, organization, and style.

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INTRODUCTION

"To spend and be spent for the Good of Mankind is what I chiefly aim at," wrote Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), America's most eminent physician of the Revolutionary period.[1] His distinguished--though controversial--career as patriot, teacher, philosopher, essayist, physician, scientist, and humanitarian reformer testified to his selfless dedication to this creed. Yet ironically, as L. H. Butterfield notes, "From 1790 onward Rush grew steadily more disillusioned about saving the world through any mundane agency."[2] "The majority of mankind are madmen at large," declared Rush in 1811. "They differ in their degrees of insanity, but I have sometimes thought the most prominent in this general mental disease are those men who by writing and reasoning attempt to cure them."[3]

By examining the nature of Rush's political, philosophical, and religious thought, we hope to shed light on this rather dramatic shift from his faith in reform through reason and science, to a faith in progress through God's directive providence--from a reliance on the values of the Enlightenment, to a reliance on the values of the Puritan tradition. Though Rush constantly argued for the

[1]Enoch Green, 1761, Letters of Benjamin Rush, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton, 1951), I, 3--hereafter cited as Letters.

[2]Butterfield, ed., Letters, I, lxxii.

[3]John Adams, July 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1090.

compatibility of science and religion, ironically he failed to synthesize them in his thought. In fact, this imperfect assimilation of science with orthodox Christian piety largely accounts for the contradictory and paradoxical nature of his ideas on theology, metaphysics, and government.

Although Rush scholars have examined in detail the major events of his remarkable life, the nature of his medical practice and theory, and the important contributions he made to education and reform,[4] they have paid relatively little attention to his political, religious, and philosophical beliefs. For example, Nathan G. Goodman, author of the only full-length biography of Rush, is virtually silent on these areas of Rush's thought. A few studies, however, have considered certain aspects of Rush's philosophical ideas. Macklin Thomas has studied the idea of progress in Rush; Daniel J. Boorstin and I. Woodbridge Riley have examined his philosophical materialism in some detail.[5] By regarding Rush as a typical 18th-century

[4]For example, Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen, 1746-1813 (Philadelphia, 1934) and Harry G. Good, Benjamin Rush and his Services to American Education (Berne, Indiana, 1918).

[5]Macklin Thomas, "The Idea of Progress in the Writings of Franklin, Freneau, Barlow, and Rush" (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1938); Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948); I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 89-101. Riley sees Rush as basically a philosophical materialist, though somewhat inconsistent, with touches of deism and common sense realism.

Jeffersonian rationalist and materialist, Boorstin has presented only one side of his complex, heterogeneous philosophy.[6] Reflecting the empirical and materialistic concepts of the Enlightenment, Rush nevertheless exhibited traditional views which stem from the Puritan heritage and philosophical skepticism, and occasionally anticipated ideas which were to emerge during the American Renaissance. Rush, then, refused to be confined to any one system in his political, philosophical, and religious thought; rather he eclectically absorbed divergent concepts as he saw fit.

What we shall attempt to demonstrate in this study, then, is that the tension between science and religion provided the dynamics of Rush's political, religious, and philosophical thought. Under Rush's political ideas, we shall see that his conviction of man's inherent depravity conditioned his views on government, and that science provided both the pattern for and the evaluation of sound political institutions. Anatomizing the various forms of government, he argued that republicanism best achieved order and well-being in society--although late in life he frequently wondered whether any form of government could make society better.

In the chapter on Rush's heterogeneous philosophy, we

[6]L. H. Butterfield, in his Introduction, Letters, I, lxix, notes that in spite of Rush's materialism, he should not be classed with deists like Franklin, Paine, or Jefferson.

shall see how his theory of the origin and maintenance of life led to his basic empirical and materialistic philosophy, and how these concepts influenced his thinking in education, morality, and religion. We shall consider some of his philosophical concepts that challenged his empirical theory of knowledge and his materialism--such as a belief in the existence of a kind of intuitive mental faculty and the mystical union of liberty and necessity. We shall, also, examine the occasional drift in his thinking toward romanticism. Finally we shall trace Rush's gradual shift from scientific rationalism to skeptical fideism, as the key to the basic conflict between the traditions of science and theology in his thought.

In the final chapter, we shall analyze his religious beliefs, noting how universalism reconciled Rush's liberal beliefs with certain orthodox Calvinistic tenets and again stressing the relation between Rush's scientific principles and his religious faith. We shall discover that Rush finally preferred a Christian faith, based on the Bible, to a science of morals and religion as a foundation for national happiness. "By renouncing the Bible," Rush observed to John Adams, to whom he always confessed his deepest felt feelings about life, "philosophers swing from their moorings upon all moral subjects. . . . It is the only correct map of the human heart. . . . All systems of religion, morals, and government not founded upon it must perish. . . ."[7]

[7]Adams, Jan. 23, 1807, Letters, II, 936.

CHAPTER ONE: BENJAMIN RUSH'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

I. Introduction

"That you may never mistake any of my opinions or principles in my future letters," Rush wrote John Adams in 1789,

> I shall add to this long one that I am as much a republican as I was in 1775 and 6, that I consider hereditary monarchy and aristocracy as rebellion against nature, that I abhor titles and everything that belongs to the pageantry of government, that I love the people but would sooner be banished to Iceland or Tobalski than gain their favor by accommodating to one of their unjust popular prejudices, that I feel a respect for my rulers bordering upon homage but that I would not be jolted two hours in the stage that plies between New York and Philadelphia to be the prime minister of the United States. . . . Under all circumstances, I hope I shall be excused in thinking for myself at all times and upon all subjects.[1]

This succinct, yet detailed, political credo suggests the main outlines of Rush's political philosophy--his republicanism, his hatred of monarchy and aristocracy, his utilization of science as a test for governmental systems, and, conditioned by the concept of human depravity, his suspicion of popular government. Above all, it suggests his political individualism. A political maverick, Rush altered his party connections frequently--not so much because he changed his views as because no one party

[1]Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514.

consistently coincided with them.[2]

We shall, in this chapter, attempt to analyze the republican philosophy of government Rush affirmed to Adams. In discussing his political thought, we shall focus particularly on certain 18th-century scientific and theological attitudes and assumptions that led him to accept a republican form of government and to reject other forms. In addition, we shall consider his views on natural and civil rights and trace his deepening political pessimism. But first we shall briefly examine his political career and party affiliations to see whether any distinct patterns of thought emerge.

Rush attributed his conversion to republicanism to a conversation in 1767 with John Bostock, a student at the University of Edinburgh. He related in his autobiography that Bostock

> now opened his mind fully to me, and declared himself to be an advocate for the Republican principles. . . . Never before had I heard the authority of Kings called in question. I had been taught to consider them nearly as essential to political order as the sun is to the order of our Solar System. For the first moment in my life I now exercised my reason upon the subject of government. I renounced the prejudices of my education upon it; and from that time to the present all my reading,

[2]"I have the highest respect for the public authority of our country; but I am satisfied that the safety of our infant republic consists in keeping a watchful eye over our rulers and in exposing their faults with a manly freedom" (William Shippen, Nov. 18, 1780, Letters, I, 258). "An intolerant spirit," Rush maintained, was "not less criminal in politics than religion. . . ." (William Linn, May 4, 1784, Letters, I, 333).

> observations and reflexions have tended more and more to shew the absurdity of hereditary power, and to prove that no form of government can be rational but that which is derived from the Suffrages of the people who are the subjects of it.[3]

"This great and active truth," he added, "became a ferment in my mind," and "I now . . . began to try the foundations of my opinions upon many other subjects."[4]

In his account, Rush perhaps exaggerated the suddenness of his republican conversion,[5] for, as his letters to Ebenezer Hazard in 1765-1766 show, he opposed the Stamp act with a growing sentiment for "the spirit of liberty among us."[6] Though he claimed his new political principles "had no effect upon my conversation or conduct" and therefore he "enjoyed in theory only the new and elevating system of government," he prophetically suggested to John Witherspoon in 1767 that the College of New Jersey under Witherspoon's presidency would become "a bulwark of the . . .

[3]"Travels Through Life," The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 46. Rush arrived in Edinburgh in early November, 1766 (Ibid., p. 42, 42 n. 10), and presumably met Bostock soon after his arrival. It would seem reasonable, however, to date Rush's conversation with Bostock on republicanism in 1767 or later since it came not during the first meeting but "in the course of our acquaintance" (Ibid., p. 46).

[4]Ibid.

[5]L. H. Butterfield suggests this (Ibid., p. 46 n. 19).

[6]Ebenezer Hazard, Nov. 8, 1765, Letters, I, 18. See also Hazard, Nov. 18, 1765, Letters, I, 20; Hazard, March 29, 1766, Letters, I, 23.

liberty of America."[7] "I am resolved," he wrote Thomas Bradford in 1768, "to devote my head, my heart, and my pen entirely to the service of America. . . ."[8]

Following his return from study abroad, Rush began his revolutionary activity by writing several inflammatory pieces, under various signatures, for Philadelphia newspapers.[9] In 1773 he successfully urged, in a public letter, that Philadelphians prevent the landing of the East India tea ship Polly because this attempt "to enslave us" threatened American liberty.[10] In 1775 Rush suggested to Thomas Paine that he write a pamphlet rallying the cause for independence, read each chapter as Paine composed it, helped to arrange for its printing, and gave it the title Common Sense.[11] Elected a delegate to the Continental

[7]"Travels Through Life," p. 46; Witherspoon, Dec. 29, 1767, Letters, I, 48.

[8]Bradford, April 15, 1768, Letters, I, 54.

[9]"Travels Through Life," pp. 109, 112. See Jacob Rush?, Jan. 19, 1769, Letters, I, 72; Jacob Rush?, Jan. 26, 1769, Letters, I, 73-75.

[10]"To His Fellow Countrymen: On Patriotism," Oct. 20, 1773, Letters, I, 84; William Gordon, Oct. 10, 1773, Letters, I, 82, 82-83 n. 4. In a letter to Adams in 1809, Rush recounted the successful resistance to the landing of the East India tea ship in December, 1773. "The flame kindled on that day," Rush concluded, "soon extended to Boston and gradually spread throughout the whole continent. It was the first throe of that convulsion which delivered Great Britain of the United States" (Adams, Aug. 14, 1809, Letters, II, 1013-1014). See also J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884 (Philadelphia, 1884), I, 285-287.

[11]"Travels Through Life," pp. 113-115. Rush had planned a similar tract himself. John Adams' autobiography

Congress, July 20, 1776,[12] Rush culminated his participation in the struggle for American independence by signing the Declaration of Independence, August 2, 1776.[13]

After the Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775, Rush "considered the seperation [sic] of the colonies from Great Britain as inevitable."[14] "The decree of heaven I believe is finally gone forth," Rush declared. "Britain

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(The Works of John Adams, ed. Charles Francis Adams, Boston, 1850-1856, II, 507) substantiates Rush's account ("Travels Through Life," p. 114 n. 21). See also Rush, "Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 323, June 8, 1809; Cheetham, July 17, 1809, Letters, II, 1008-1009.

[12]For a summary of Rush's activities in Continental Congress, see Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush (Philadelphia, 1934), pp. 56-62. See also "Travels Through Life," pp. 117, 121, 121 n. 39; Charles Lee, July 23, 1776, Letters, I, 103-104, 105 n. 6; Walter Jones, July 30, 1776, Letters, I, 108; R. H. Lee, Dec. 30, 1776, Letters, I, 123; Julia Rush, Jan. 23, 1777, Letters, I, 130, 131 n. 3. On the weakness of Continental Congress, see Rush's letters to Julia Rush, July 23, 1776, Letters, I, 105-106; Patrick Henry, Jan. 12, 1778, Letters, I, 182-183; Abigail Adams, Sept. 3, 1778, Letters, I, 218; William Shippen, Nov. 18, 1780, Letters, I, 256-260.

[13]Letters, I, 90; "Travels Through Life," p. 119, 119 n. 33. Rush frequently commented on the effects of the Declaration--see "Travels Through Life," p. 121; "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 81; Charles Lee, July 23, 1776, Letters, I, 103-104; Walter Jones, July 30, 1776, Letters, I, 108; Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1778, Letters, I, 475. In a letter to Adams in 1811, Rush recalled the ceremony of the signing of the document (July 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1090). Rush included in his autobiography a series of brief sketches on the signers of the Declaration as well as other important figures of the Revolution (Characters of the Revolutionary Patriots, "Travels Through Life," pp. 138-158). Following his own name, Rush wrote simply: "He aimed well" (Ibid., p. 148).

[14]"Travels Through Life," p. 112.

and America will hereafter be distinct empires."[15] In his desire for independence, he "was actuated by the double motives of the safety of my country and a predilection to a Republican form of government which I now saw within her grasp."[16]

His opposition to the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 (he severely censured it in Observations upon the Present Government of Pennsylvania, 1777)[17] drew him from the radical Whigs into the orbit of the moderate Whigs[18] and cost him his seat in Congress.[19] From 1776 to 1790, in response to the radical Pennsylvania government--"absurd in its principles and incapable of execution without the most alarming influence upon liberty"--Rush became

[15]Thomas Ruston, Oct. 29, 1775, Letters, I, 92. See Julia Rush, June 1, 1776, Letters, I, 102.

[16]"Travels Through Life," p. 115. See also Adams, July 11, 1806, Letters, II, 924, for Rush's views on the necessity of separation.

[17]Especially criticizing its unicameral legislature and weak executive, he called for its immediate revision ("Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 54-84). See the detailed account of this constitution and its consequences in Robert L. Brunhouse, The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania 1776-1790 (Harrisburg, 1942).

[18]The moderates had stopped short of revolution in their opposition to Britain. Bitterly opposed to the radical Pennsylvania Constitution, the moderates (i.e., Republicans or "anti-constitutionalists"), led by Robert Morris, John Dickinson, James Wilson, and Rush, gradually regained political control and drew up a new state constitution in 1790 ("Travels Through Life," p. 130 n. 61).

[19]"Travels Through Life," pp. 130, 131 n. 1; Julia Rush, Jan. 24, 1777, Letters, I, 130, 131 n. 3.

increasingly conservative.[20] Continually working for a new state constitution, he played a significant part in calling a constitutional convention in 1789.[21] Completing "the triumphs of reason and virtue," Rush exclaimed, the new Pennsylvania Constitution of 1790 "comprehends in it every principle of liberty and just government."[22]

Nationally, by 1787, Rush had virtually become a Federalist. At the urging of John Dickinson, Rush publicly recommended and defended the new Federal Constitution and subsequently was elected a member of the Pennsylvania ratifying convention in 1787.[23] The federal procession

[20]Anthony Wayne, April 2, 1777, Letters, I, 137. For Rush's own summary of his political activity in Pennsylvania during these years, see his letter to Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 532-534. Rush particularly opposed the Pennsylvania test laws (modified in 1786 and repealed in 1789) because they were inimical to liberty and did not confer "equal privileges upon every citizen of the state" (Richard Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 385; _____, Nov. 10, 1784, Letters, I, 340-341 n. 3). Consequently, he wrote an anonymous pamphlet called Considerations upon the Present Test-Law of Pennsylvania. . . , Phila.: Styner and Cist, 1784 (Ibid., I, 341 n. 3). See Goodman, Benjamin Rush, pp. 72-73, for a summary of Rush's pamphlet.

[21]The recommendation that passed the Assembly originated at a meeting in Rush's house. He was one of the signers of circular letters which produced the petition for the measure (Rush, "Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, ed. Corner, p. 178, Sept. 15, 1789; Montgomery, March 27, 1789, Letters, I, 510 n. 3). In 1784 he criticized the defensive action taken by the Republican Party and urged aggressive tactics to defeat the Constitutionalists (_____, Nov. 10, 1784, Letters, I, 340).

[22]John Montgomery, March 27, 1789, Letters, I, 509; _____, April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 558.

[23]"Travels Through Life," p. 160, 160 n. 6.

in Philadelphia, July 4, 1788, in honor of the new government celebrated, Rush believed, "a new triumph of knowledge over ignorance, of virtue over vice, and of liberty over slavery"; it was, above all, the culmination of "every wish I ever entertained in every stage of the Revolution for the happiness of my country.[24]

His publications supporting the new national government revealed his growing conservatism. In an Address . . . on the Defects of the Confederation (1787), he condemned the Articles because they lacked coercive power, vested sovereign power in a unicameral legislature, and rotated its members too frequently.[25] In a letter to Dr. Richard Price of London in 1787, Rush supported the use of force in creating a strong federal government:

> You must not be surprised if you should hear of our new system of government meeting with some opposition. There are in all our states little characters whom a great and respectable government will sink into insignificance. These men will excite factions among us, but they will be of a temporary duration. Time, necessity, and the gradual operation of reason will carry it down, and if these fail force will not be wanting to carry it into execution, for not only all the wealth but all the military men of our country (associated in the Society of the Cincinnati) are in favor of a wise and efficient government.[26]

That Rush approved of a militant role for the Society of the

[24]Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, Letters, I, 471, 475; David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455.

[25]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 27.

[26]Price, June 2, 1787, Letters, I, 418.

Cincinnati--an organization that some believed favored the overthrow of the democratic Confederation and the establishment of a monarchy with Washington as its head--showed the depth of his conservatism (however temporary) at this time, especially in view of his usual anti-militarism and his later Jeffersonianism.[27]

His public letter on the subject of morals, addressed to ministers of all denominations, 1788, further revealed his anti-democratic feelings; it contained a diatribe (deleted significantly from the text in his Essays, 1798) against frequent elections, as having "a most pernicious influence upon morals."[28] Finally, his arguments against a bill of rights, in a letter to David Ramsay in 1788, also aligned him with the Federalists against democratic liberalism. Not only did he reject the need for a bill of rights in the new Constitution, but he emphasized the depravity of the people, compared democracy to a self-destructive volcano, and stressed the necessity of law to secure property and protect person.[29]

After the revision of the Pennsylvania Constitution in 1790, Rush, in contrast to his active participation in

[27]Price, June 3, 1787, Letters, I, 420 n. 3.

[28]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 467 n. 3.

[29]Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455.

state and national affairs in 1773-1789, withdrew from politics for the rest of his life. He did not campaign actively for any candidate for office, though he frequently discussed state, national, and international politics in his letters, especially those to John Adams and Thomas Jefferson.[30] When he accepted the post of Treasurer of the United States Mint, November 27, 1797, from President John Adams, he stipulated that he would not participate in politics--as he explained:

> Soon after I received my commission as treasurer of the Mint, I told the President of the United States that I must act towards him as Dr. Ambrose did to Henry the 4th of France when he sent for him to be his family physician. He stipulated with the King "never to see a battle nor to change his religion." I begged in like manner to be forever excused from taking a part in any political controversy. The President smiled and did not appear offended at the application of the anecdote to the case in point.[31]

[30]"Travels Through Life," p. 95, 95 n. 31. "Having relinquished public pursuits, I led a retired life, associating chiefly with my patients and a few literary friends. I kept up a slender intercourse with public men. I visited the President of the United States but once and never heard a single speech in the Senate or House of Representatives during residence of either of them in Philadelphia. I ceased to read such parts of the news papers of our city as contained an account of the affairs of our country. By thus keeping myself ignorant, I kept myself indifferent to all the measures which agitated and divided the United States during the memorable years in which the government was administered by Genl. Washington and Mr. Adams" (Ibid.).

[31]Ashton Alexander, Feb. 20, 1798, Letters, II, 797. On this appointment, see "Travels Through Life, pp. 102-103, 103 n. 49; Butterfield, ed. "Appendix II: John Adams' Appointment of Rush as Treasurer of the Mint," Letters,

Rush tended to glory in his political indifference, although he exaggerated his ignorance of public affairs. "I still preserve," he wrote in 1798, "my neutrality upon all public questions by the most studied ignorance of them."[32] He would not, he told James McHenry in 1800, surrender his "abstraction" from politics "to be President of the United States."[33] In one of several allegorical dreams that delighted Adams, Rush summed up his retreat from political affairs:

> About the year 1790 I imagined I was going up Second Street in our city and was much struck by observing a great number of people assembled near Christ Church gazing at a man

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II, 1209-1212. Since Rush had favored Jefferson's candidacy over Adams' in 1796, many criticized Adams' appointment. "Upon my being nominated by the President," Rush wrote in Travels Through Life, "several persons remonstrated with him against my appointment, urging that I was a French Democrat" ("Travels Through Life," p. 102).

[32]Ashton Alexander, Feb. 20, 1798, Letters, II, 797. "I grant that man is naturally a domestic, a social, and a political or national animal," Rush wrote Adams, ". . . . But those trible [thus in MS. triple? or tribal?] passions have been and may be subdued. There are political as well as social and domestic monks. Happy the man that in the present state of our country has put on the hood and that can look upon a newspaper and the history of town meetings as an old friar looks upon a blooming young woman. If I have not attained to this felicity, I have in a great measure deserved it, for I generally hear and read with the same indifference of the proceedings of the leaders of both the great parties that now agitate and divide our country" (Adams, Sept. 6, 1809, Letters, II, 1019-1020, 1021 n. 7). See also Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 768.

[33]McHenry, Aug. 12, 1800, Letters, II, 819. "While children dispute and fight about their gingerbread and nuts, and party men about posts of honor, the pleasure of one evening's successful investigation of a moral or physical truth, or an hour spent in literary or philosophical society, will more than outweigh all the Ambition ever conferred upon her votaries" (Ibid.).

> who was seated on the ball just below the vane of the steeple of the Church. I asked what was the matter. One of my fellow citizens came up to me and said, the man whom you see yonder has discovered a method of regulating the weather, and that he could produce rain and sunshine and cause the wind to blow from any quarter he pleased. I now joined the crowd in gazing at him. He had a trident in his hand which he waved in the air, and called at the same time to the wind, which then blew from the northeast, to blow from the northwest. I observed the vane of the steeple while he was speaking, but perceived no motion in it. He then called for rain, but the clouds passed over the city without dropping a particle of water. He now became agitated and dejected, and complained of the refractory elements in the most affecting terms. Struck with the issue of his conduct, I said to my friend who stood near to me, "The man is certainly mad." Instantly a figured dressed like a flying Mercury descended rapidly from him, with a streamer in his hand, and holding it before my eyes bid me read the inscription on it. It was: "De te fabula narratur." The impression of these words was so forcible upon my mind that I instantly awoke, and from that time I determined never again to attempt to influence the opinions and passions of my fellow citizens upon political subjects.[34]

Though increasingly reluctant to engage in politics after 1790, Rush nevertheless shifted his political sentiments from the Federalists to the Jeffersonians. When Hamilton submitted to Congress in January 1790 his famed plan to fund the war debt and redeem at par heretofore almost worthless script (most of which had passed into the hands of speculators) paid to soldiers and creditors during the Revolution, Rush's reaction was immediate and

[34]Adams, March 23, 1805, Letters, II, 892-893. The Latin quote is from Horace, Satires, I, i, 69-70: "The story is told of you yourself."

negative. "I feel disposed," he admitted to James Madison, in February 1790,

> to wish that my name was blotted out from having contributed a single mite towards the American Revolution. We have effected a deliverance from the national injustice of Great Britain, to be subjugated by a mighty act of national injustice by the United States.
>
> It is amusing to hear gentlemen talk of the "public blessing" of a debt contracted to foreigners and a few American speculators of four or five millions of dollars a year. Nothing fundamentally unjust can ever produce happiness in its issue. It will lay the foundation of an aristocracy in our country. It will change the property of nine-tenths of the freeholders of the States, and it will be a lasting monument of the efficacy of idleness, speculation, and fraud above industry, economy, and integrity in obtaining wealth and independence. Nor is this all. It will be a beacon to deter other nations and future generations from attempting to better their situations, for it clearly establishes this proposition, that revolutions like party spirit are the rage of many for the benefit of a few.[35]

That Hamilton's funding system alone converted Rush from a Federalist to an Antifederalist, or Jeffersonian, position is hardly overstating the case. He considered its injustice to Revolutionary soldiers a permanent blot on the nation's virtue. Dashing his hopes for an enduring republic under the new Constitution, the funding system and the speculative mania growing out of it were largely responsible for the deepening political pessimism of his

[35] Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 539. See also Madison, April 10, 1790, Letters, I, 543; Thomas Fitzsimons?, Aug. 5, 1790, Letters, I, 569. For background, see Corner, ed. "Appendix 2, Background of the Speculation of 1791-1792," Autobiography, pp. 366-368.

last years.[36] At this propitious time, his meeting with Jefferson, March 17, 1790, completed his conversion and made him a consistant (though moderate) follower of Jeffersonian politics for the rest of his life.[37]

[36]Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 541-542 n. 2. Rush recorded in his commonplace book, 1792-1813, and in letters to friends evidence that would support Charles A. Beard's thesis, in The Rise of American Civilization (New York, 1927), I, 354, and "The Economic Origins of Jeffersonian Democracy," AHR, XIX (1914), 282, that some of the members of Congress who held certificates were unduly influenced in their decisions. See "1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 217, March 30, 1792; p. 227, Aug. 27, 1792; Madison, April 10, 1790, Letters, I, 543; Aaron Burr, Sept. 24, 1792, Letters, I, 623; Adams, Jan. 6, 1806, Letters, II, 913.

[37]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 546, 548-549 n. 10; "1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 181, March 17, 1790. "Visited Mr. Jefferson on his way to New York. It was the first time I saw him since his return from France. He was plain in his dress and unchanged in his manners. He still professed himself attached to republican forms of government, and deplored the change of opinion upon this subject in John Adams, of whom he spoke with respect and affection as a great and upright man" (Ibid.). Preferring Jefferson to Adams when his two friends ran for the Presidency in 1796, he nevertheless refused to view with alarm the possibility of Adams' election: "It is expected that Mr. Washington will retire next fall. If so, the contest for his successor will be between Mr. Adams and Mr. Jefferson. The former is devoted to monarchy in all its forms and consequences. The latter is a pure republican, enlightened at the same time in chemistry, natural history, and medicine. He is, in a word, a Citizen of the World and the friend of universal peace and happiness. How the contest will end I know not. Mr. Washington's friends will support Mr. Adams. His enemies (for enemies he has) will support Mr. Jefferson. Our country will flourish I hope under any issue of the election, for Mr. Adams, with monarchical principles, is a republican in his manners and a most upright, worthy man. He will govern without a council, for he possesses great knowledge and the most vigorous internal resources of mind" (James Currie, July 26, 1796, Letters, II, 779). See also Samuel Bayard, Nov. 25, 1796, II, 782.

This review of Rush's political career, I believe, suggests several distinct patterns in his thought. One is the progressive shift from an idealistic to a realistic appraisal of political affairs--aptly illustrated by the contrast between his messianic apostrophe to liberty in a letter of William Gordon in 1778 and his analysis in 1800 of the selfish motives of many Whigs who participated in the act of separation from Britain.[38] Another pattern is his gradual loss of optimism, only momentarily halted by his hopes for the new Federal Constitution in the late 1780's.[39] If Rush's utopian vision of the Revolution in his May 29, 1776, letter to his wife was ecstatically optimistic, the disillusion of his June 13, 1808, letter to Adams where he wished "I could erase my name from the Declaration of Independence" demonstrated how subsequent events completely shattered his faith.[40] As early as 1798 he lamented, "Happy should I be could I escape to the foot of some western mountain where I should never hear the names of liberty and government."[41] As he summed it up to Adams in 1812, "I have been educated in the unbelief . . . of the perfectibility of governments composed of imperfect

[38]William Gordon, Dec. 10, 1778, Letters, I, 221-222; "Travels Through Life," pp. 118-119.

[39]See "On the Defects of the Confederation," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 31.

[40]Julia Rush, May 29, 1776, Letters, I, 99-100; Adams, June 13, 1808, Letters, II, 966.

[41]Ashton Alexander, Feb. 20, 1798, Letters, II, 797.

materials."[42]

That, in spite of his rather extreme conservatism in the late 1780's, Rush was remarkably consistent in his political principles forms an additional pattern. From 1766 to 1803 Rush's letters and autobiography reveal an enduring belief in a republican form of government. "Upon one question I was always decided," Rush emphasized in Travels Through Life (1800), "that was in favor of the Republican form of the constitution of the United States."[43] Even at the height of his federalistic beliefs, he stressed that "I am as much a republican as I was in 1775 and 6," having "acquired no new opinions or principles upon the subjects of republics by the sorrowful events we have lately witnessed in America."[44] Rush still maintained this position after he withdrew from the political arena; ". . . precarious as the tenure may be by which we hold our excellent republican form of government," he wrote Jefferson in 1803, "I still continue in my abstracted situation and private pursuits in life to admire and prefer it to all others as most consistent with the rational nature and the moral and religious obligations of man."[45]

[42]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171. See also Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

[43]"Travels Through Life," p. 95.

[44]Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514; Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455.

[45]Jefferson, March 12, 1803, Letters, II, 859. "But under these habits of retirement," he wrote Horatio Gates

Actually, we could designate Rush a moderate avoiding the extremes of pure democracy and absolute monarchy. He once described his sole companion in political discussions as one whose mind retained "the texture which the Revolution gave it" because he was "neither a Frenchman nor an Englishman" in political beliefs.[46] "The politicians hate me," Rush confessed to Adams in 1810, "for being neither a democrat nor a monarchist, neither a Frenchman nor an Englishman."[47] Thus Rush's republicanism was a position which embodied the 18th-century ideal of moderation, one which eschewed extremism in either direction on the political spectrum.

It will be our purpose in the following sections, then, to analyze the republican principles that Rush so firmly and consistently held from his student days at Edinburgh to his death in 1813 and that provided the motivation for the roles he played in the drama of the American Revolution and the new nation's struggle to form a more perfect union.

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in 1795, "my principles have undergone no change. The word Republic is still music in my ears" (Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 768).

[46]Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 983.

[47]Adams, Sept. 8, 1810, Letters, II, 1061. "We are not 'all Federalists and all Republicans,' but we are (with the exception of a few retired and growling neutrals) all Frenchmen or all Englishmen. The men of both those nations have immense advantages over you and me. By not eating of the onions of either of them, we are constantly exposed to the offensive breath of them both" (Adams, March 13, 1809, Letters, II, 998).

Though primarily concerned with Rush's political thought itself, we should note briefly some of the sources of his ideas on government. His political views were influenced by four sources: books on political theory and law, conversations with contemporaries, the Edinburgh and London environments, and ancestral inspiration. The last influence, more sentimental than actual, Rush derived from his first American ancestor, John Rush, cavalry commander under Cromwell, who came to Pennsylvania in 1683. "To the sight of his sword," Rush remarked to Jefferson, "I owe much of the spirit which animated me in 1774, and to the respect and admiration which I was early taught to cherish for his virtues and exploits I owe a large portion of my republican temper and principles."[48]

The intellectual ferment brought about by residence in Edinburgh and in London also played an important formative role in his political thought. While in Edinburgh, wrote Rush in Travels Through Life, "My attachment to political justice was much encreased by my adopting republican principles."[49] In London, he met, among others, the political radical John Wilkes and Mrs. Catharine Macaulay, "the celebrated republican historian of England" (as he described her), and joined their cotaries.[50] From Wilkes, Rush wrote

[48]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 825-826.

[49]"Travels Through Life," p. 109.

[50]Ibid., p. 60. For Rush's account of conversations with Wilkes and Mrs. Macaulay, see Ibid., pp. 60-62, and for background on his relationship with them, see Letters,

his brother Jacob in 1769, "I heard a number of sentiments . . . that would have done honor to a SIDNEY or a HAMDEN. He is an enthusiast for AMERICAN Liberty . . . ."[51] Rush considered Mrs. Macaulay's History of England . . . , written in reply to Hume's tory interpretation of English history, "of great importance to us in the present critical situation of our affairs."[52]

Rush read most of the leading 17th- and 18th-century political thinkers--Locke, Harrington, Montesquieu, Filmer, Hobbes, Sidney, Blackstone, Foster--and attested to their influence in his essays and letters. The reading of Sir William Blackstone's Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765) and Sir Michael Foster's Discourses upon a Few Branches of the Crown Law (1762), he remarked in Travels, partly accounted for "the relish for political science which I felt in the beginning of the American Revolution."[53] In his critical analysis of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, he called John Locke an oracle on the principles of government, James Harrington and Montesquieu oracles on the forms of government--a designation indicative of their

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I, 72-73 n. 1, 2; I, 71 n. 1; "Travels Through Life," p. 59 n. 55.

[51]Jacob Rush, Jan. 19, 1769, Letters, I, 72.

[52]Jacob Rush, Jan. 26, 1769, Letters, I, 74.

[53]"Travels Through Life," pp. 76-77. Rush mentioned reading Algernon Sidney's Discourses concerning Government (1698), an 18th-century handbook of Whiggism, as a young man (Adams, March 13, 1809, Letters, II, 997).

impact on his political beliefs.[54]

In addition to the influence of European writers, his political principles, Rush recalled in 1800, "were daily nourished by conversations with Saml. and Jno Adams, David Rittenhouse and Owen Biddle, all of whom appeared to be republicans from choice."[55] Rush's list was hardly complete, however, for the number of friends who, through conversation and correspondence, influenced Rush's political thinking (the influence was reciprocal, of course) was almost endless: Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, John Dickinson, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Joseph Priestley, Richard Price, John Coakley Lettsom, Jacques Barbeu Dubourg, Thomas Jefferson, John Witherspoon, and Francisco de Miranda--to name only a few. Of these, Jefferson's influence on Rush's political concepts was especially important. Possessing "a genius of the first order" that "was universal in its objects," Rush observed, Jefferson "was not less distinguished for his political, than his mathematical and philosophical knowledge."[56] "I consider you and him," he wrote John Adams in 1812, "as the North and South Poles of the American Revolution. Some

[54]"Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 78. In his essay Rush also suggested the negative influence of Thomas Hobbes' and Sir Robert Filmer's political philosophies when he called them "destructive of human happiness" (Ibid.).

[55]"Travels Through Life," p. 115.

[56]Ibid., p. 151.

talked, some wrote, and some fought to promote and establish it, but you and Mr. Jefferson thought for us all."[57]

The person who had the greatest impact upon Rush's political philosophy was unquestionably John Adams, "my first preceptor in the science of government," whose Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States (1787-1788) "shall be the Alcoran of my boys upon the great subject of political happiness." "I owe more than I can express to you," he wrote Adams in 1788, "for your excellent volumes upon government. . . . You have laid the world and posterity under great obligations by your remarks. I am not more satisfied of the truth of any one proposition in Euclid than I am of the truth of your leading propositions in government."[58]

Rush's debt, then, to his contemporaries, 17th- and 18th-century theorists, to the intellectual milieu of Edinburgh and London, and to John Rush, his first American ancestor, was considerable, but not slavish--as seen in his remark to Adams that however great his obligation to him, "we hold different opinions upon some subjects. . . ."[59]

[57]Adams, Feb. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1127.

[58]Adams, Feb. 12, 1790, Letters, I, 530; Adams, July 2, 1788, Letters, I, 468.

[59]Adams, Feb. 12, 1790, Letters, I, 530.

II. The Scientific and Religious Foundations of Rush's Political Thought

Before considering Benjamin Rush's political beliefs, we should examine, in addition to the influences derived from his contact with 17th- and 18th-century political writers, certain fundamental premises that conditioned his speculations. These assumptions will help to illuminate and unify his numerous observations on the nature of government. There are two key ideas, it seems to me, that are particularly essential to a complete understanding of Rush's political thought--his application of scientific principles to a study of politics, and the political implications of his belief in the inherent depravity of the human species.

Rush's concept of scientific government is the first, and perhaps most essential of these keys to his political thought. His belief that man could apply the methodology and laws of Newtonian physics to an analysis of his political institutions was hardly unique, of course, in an age that saw no real difference between scientific laws and those of human institutions. Using the perfection of Newton's laws of motion as guidelines for human activity in every field, men, the age believed, could work out a science of man and society as precisely as in the physical sciences. In fact, as Thomas Paine pointed out in The Age of Reason, it became man's moral duty to imitate

the reasonableness, regularity, and lawfulness of the universe in all his endeavors. Thus the Enlightenment in America abounded with efforts to develop a science of politics, to use the orderly universe as a pattern for government--as seen, for example, in John Adams' evaluation of the state governments by applying scientific principles in order to refute Turgot's charge that they were not scientific, and in the formation of learned societies for the purpose of applying science to politics.[60]

Rush constantly--almost unconsciously--compared political institutions to the Newtonian universe. He described the new Federal Constitution as "the great machine" whose "wheels" were to be "set in motion."[61] Applying Newtonian mechanistic imagery to political theory, Rush observed that

> I consider it is possible to convert men into republican machines. This must be done, if we expect them to perform their parts properly, in the great machine of the government of the state. That republic is sophisticated with monarchy or aristocracy that does not revolve upon the wills of the people, and these must be fitted to each other by means of education before they can be made to produce regularity and unison in government.[62]

[60]Brooke Hindle, The Pursuit of Science in Revolutionary America, 1735-1789 (Chapel Hill, 1956), pp. 377-378; Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), pp. 65-69.

[61]Dickinson, July 15, 1788, Letters, I, 479.

[62]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 92.

Judgment and evaluation were implicit in Rush's analogy. The degree to which the political structure successfully imitated the orderly, mechanistic universe determined its efficacy and value. He condemned the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 precisely because it was "a monster in nature."[63] If a republican form of government passed the Newtonian test--as Rush believed it did--then monarchy and aristocracy failed it: ". . . I consider hereditary monarchy and aristocracy as rebellion against nature. . . ."[64] Similarly, Rush found a sound scientific basis for the concept of popular sovereignty. If the Creator made "the beauty and harmony of the universe" contingent on "the universal and mutual dependence" of its component parts, then it followed that government also must be "dependent on those for whose benefit alone all government should exist."[65] The design and order of nature, therefore, became for Rush a measure of value for political systems. But it also served as a means for perfecting them.

Since government was a science reducible to fundamental principles and forms, to fixed laws, Rush thought that man should approach political problems in the spirit of scientific investigation.[66] "Government, like all other sciences,"

[63]"Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[64]Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514.

[65]Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, pp. 67-78.

[66]John Dunlop, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 235; "Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 78; "On the

argued Rush, "is of a progressive nature. The chains which have bound this science in Europe are happily unloosed in America. Here it is open to investigation and improvement." By utilizing the techniques of the laboratory, man could develop a political science that promoted stability and happiness--as Rush put it, just as perishable matter is "rendered durable by certain chemical operations," so "it is possible to combine power in such a way as not only to encrease the happiness, but to promote the duration of republican forms of government" far beyond their usual limits. Hence, through controlled experimentation, man could fit "republican machines" together in "the great machine of the government."[67]

Though Rush viewed government scientifically and constantly analyzed political problems according to Newtonian principles, he was no naive believer in the perfection of human government.[68] "While philosophy," wrote Rush, "has protected us by its discoveries from a thousand natural evils, government has unhappily followed with an unequal pace."[69] He saw the folly of the framers of the

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Defects of the Confederation," Selected Writings, p. 28; Nye, p. 67.

[67]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, pp. 91, 92.

[68]Nye, p. 69, notes that "Rush and Franklin were much less certain of the reliability of a priori assumptions, much more carefully inductive, and much less self-assured about their conclusions."

[69]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 91.

Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 who thought it would last forever because it was "the perfection of human wisdom."[70] The fault lay, Rush believed, not in the perfect model, the universe, but in imperfect human nature. "It would be to dishonor human genius, only to name the many defects which still exist in the best system of legislation." Nevertheless, Rush saw no reason to abandon the hope that American reformers, through rational effort, might not improve the lagging science of government.[71]

If Rush discovered patterns for imitation and criteria for evaluation in natural philosophy, he also found additional tests for successful political institutions in natural history. Turning to physiology and medicine, he explored the relationship between the natural history of the species and political science, between physical and social health. "There is an indissoluble union," he remarked, "between moral, political and physical happiness," and thus the best form of government was one "most favorable to animal life."[72] From the standpoint of Lockean environmentalism, Rush knew that good political institutions favored the health of the human body--not merely in physical,

[70]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 74.

[71]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 91.

[72]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 168. Rush argued against Washington as the capitol because its unhealthy environment would adversely affect government and society and foster "party and malignant passions" (Adams, Oct. 2, 1810, Letters, II, 1067).

but in mental and moral terms as well.[73] "The dimensions of the human mind," he suggested, "are apt to be regulated by the extent and objects of the government under which it is formed."[74] Under a well-ordered, happy political society, then, the human species flourished, but under a diseased government, its citizens were liable to be morally, psychologically, and physically ill.

Rush constantly sought evidence to support his contention that a healthy society composed of a vigorous and growing citizenry was the most dependable measure of good government and that illness was a symptom of social disorder. To illustrate the beneficial effects of political liberty on the human species, he noted that it produced "the greatest quantity of animal life" as well as "the same increase of the quantity of mind."[75] But a despotic government, such as in Turkey, depressed the mental faculties; "it weakens not only the understanding; but it annihilates all that immense source of stimuli [to animal life] which arises from the exercise of domestic and public

[73]Rush discussed the influence of environment on the moral faculty in "The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 181-211.

[74]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454. See also Nathanial Greene, April 15, 1782, Letters, I, 268.

[75]Rush, Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), p. 109, quoted in Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), p. 282 n. 12.

affections."[76] Speculation over the script of the Bank of the United States in August 1791, Rush noted, "excited febrile diseases" in three patients, one of whom died in a few days from a madness brought on by a successful sale of script. The "Script mania" which kept Philadelphia in a "paroxysm of avarice" for days "exhibited a truer picture of a bedlam" than a market place.[77] He also stressed the reciprocal connection between individual and social health when he hinted that excessive passions, such as pleasure and ambition, not only disordered the human body but brought with it social discord.[78]

Rush's Oration on Indian medicine (1774), which in part compared the health of North American Indians with that of civilized nations, was an excellent example of his attempt to work out a scientific relationship between man and his political society.[79] Implying a close connection

[76]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 166.

[77]Ibid., p. 169; "Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 203; Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 183. In his "Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Rush kept a day by day account of the mania over bank script (Autobiography, pp. 203-207). In his essay on "The Influence of the American Revolution upon the Human Body," Rush suggested that the speculative craze that seized many friends of the Revolution "should rather be considered as a disease than as a passion. It unhinged the judgment, deposed the moral faculty, and filled the imagination . . . with airy and impracticable schemes of wealth and grandeur." It was, he concluded, a "species of insanity" (Selected Writings, p. 331).

[78]Boorstin, pp. 183-184; "Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 145.

[79]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 254-292--especially pp. 283-290, 271-272.

between natural health and natural liberty, Rush suggested that if men sacrificed either of them, "we pay too high a price for the blessings of civilization." For example, many customs, because they compensated for the loss of natural health, became "necessary in the corrupt stages of society"; women maintained their color with carmine and their spirits with ratifia, and men protected themselves from excessive heat and cold with lavender and hartshorn. Moreover, a despotic society brought with it artificial diseases which

> extend themselves through every class and profession among men. How fatal are the effects of idleness and intemperance among the rich, and of hard labor and penury among the poor! What pallid looks are contracted by the votaries of science from hanging over the "sickly taper!" How many diseases are entailed upon manufacturers, by the materials in which they work, and the posture of their bodies! What monkish diseases do we observe from monkish continence and monkish vices! We pass over the increase of accidents from building, sailing, riding and the like. War, as if too slow in destroying the human species, calls in a train of diseases peculiar to civilized nations. What havock have the corruption and monopoly of provisions, a damp soil, and an unwholesome sky, made, in a few days, in an army! . . . Even our modern discoveries in geography, by extending the empire of commerce, have likewise extended the empire of diseases. What desolation have the East and West Indies made of British subjects! . . . I am not one of those modern philosophers, who derive the vices of mankind from the influence of civilization; but I am safe in asserting, that their number and malignity increase with the refinements of polished life.

The health of society, then, was for Rush the measure of its progress. "The state of a country in point of population, temperance, and industry," he pointed out, "is

so connected with its diseases, that a tolerable idea may be formed of it, by looking over its bills of mortality. HOSPITALS, with all their boasted advantages, exhibit at the same time monuments of the charity and depravity of a people." Rush did not conclude, however, that civilization must inevitably pay the price of ill health; what was needed was a political and economic environment that encouraged the health of the species--namely, liberty:

> The complete enjoyment of health is as compatible with civilization, as the enjoyment of civil liberty. We read of countries, rich in every thing that can form national happiness and national grandeur, the diseases of which are nearly as few and simple as those of the Indians. We hear of no diseases among the Jews, while they were under their democratical form of government. . . . The inhabitants of Switzerland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden, enjoy the chief advantages of civilization without having surrendered for them the blessings of natural health. But it is unnecessary to appeal to ancient or remote nations to prove, that health is not incompatible with civilization. The inhabitants of many parts of New England, particularly the province of Connecticut, are strangers to artificial diseases.[80]

And, as Rush made clear in his Lectures on Animal Life, the reason for longevity and health in Connecticut was the fact of 150 years of liberty.[81]

[80]Rush added in a footnote: "From a calculation made by an ingenious foreigner, it appears, that a greater proportion of old-people are to be found in Connecticut, than in any colony in North-America. They have no public hospitals or poor-houses; nor is a beggar to be seen among them. There cannot be more striking proofs than these facts of the simplicity of their manners" ("Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 287 n.).

[81]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 168.

The proper economic environment was important too. Because of the harmful effect of factories on health, Rush cautioned "what kind of manufactures we admit among us" and urged "the least restraint to those manufactories among men, which admit of free air, and the exercise of all their limbs." The greatest advantages to social health and population growth, however, "can only be secured . . . by AGRICULTURE," "the true basis of national health, riches and populousness," stressed Rush, once again explicitly using health as a standard for successful institutions. Throughout the Oration, then, Rush demonstrated the vital connection between individual and social well-being.

A particular application of Rush's thesis that the human species flourished under proper political conditions was his "Account of the Influence of the Military and Political events of the American Revolution upon the Human Body" (1789).[82] In it, Rush analyzed the relationship between bodily and social health, and correct political beliefs. If social upheavel affected man's physical and moral well-being, how did the Revolutionary War affect

[82]"Influence of the American Revolution," 1789, Selected Writings, pp. 325-333; Boorstin, pp. 181-183. Rush also noted the relation between disease and political activity when he wrote William Marshall in 1798: "I agree with you in deriving our physical calamities from moral causes. Antifederal infidelity and Federal hypocrisy, with all the vices that flow from both, pervade every part of the United States" (Marshall, Sept. 15, 1798, Letters, II, 807).

Americans? Rush noted the increase of apoplexies in Philadelphia during the winter of 1774-1775, "a period of uncommon anxiety" while the colonies wavered between reconciliation and rebellion. But once the hostilities began, "the political events of the revolution," Rush emphasized, "produced different effects upon the human body, through the medium of the mind, accordingly as they acted upon the friends or enemies of the revolution."

The Tories frequently suffered from a mental and physical disease Rush named "revolutiana"--called "protection fever" by the common people because its chief cause seemed to be the Loyalists' obsession for the protection of property. Rush listed several causes of the disease: loss of political influence, destruction of the Anglican hierarchy in America, loss of wealth by cancellation of debts and inflation, oppressive laws, and neglect by former friends. For some, the disease was fatal. In South Carolina, for example, several Loyalists who swore allegiance to England to protect their estates died from "protection fever" after the British troops evacuated Charleston. In others, Rush reported, revolutiana indirectly was fatal by driving the afflicted to exile, confinement, or spirituous liquors. As political disorder produced ill health in the monarchists, so it affected the extreme radicals adversely. "The excess of the passion for liberty," Rush observed, ". . . produced, in many people, opinions and conduct, which could not be removed by reason nor restrained

by government. . . ." These opinions so influenced the understandings, passions, and morals of the liberals that they "constituted a form of insanity" Rush designated as "anarchia."

In sharp contrast to the maladies of the loyalist and anarchist was the uncommonly good health of those with proper political views--the Whigs. Rush noted that many who supported the Revolution "were restored to perfect health," citing particularly the many women cured of hysteria. In spite of defeats, loss of property, and even the death of relatives, the friends of the Revolution maintained "an uncommon cheerfulness." Moreover, Whigs engaged in military actions enjoyed "extraordinary healthiness," Rush reported, noting that the Philadelphia militia of 1500 men, joining Washington's army in late 1776, survived the rigors of winter for six weeks with only two falling ill and one dying--remarkable Rush felt since most of them were used to city life. He concluded that

> The patience, firmness, and magnanimity with which the officers and soldiers of the American army endured the complicated evils of hunger, cold, and nakedness, can only be ascribed to an insensibility of body produced by an uncommon tone of mind excited by the love of liberty and their country.

To Rush, the most significant evidence of the beneficial connection between the American cause and bodily health was the fact that during the war population flourished, marriages were more fruitful than before, and many women gave birth to children after many years of unfruitful

marriage.

Thus Rush carefully developed the relationship between politics and health. A healthy, vigorous people became the most important criterion for sound political institutions; good government meant healthy citizens. Rush utilized, then, the natural history of the human species and the mechanically perfect cosmos as measure and model for good government--as we shall see in the ensuing sections.

Rush's view of human nature is the second key to an understanding of Rush's political philosophy. Since it formed the foundation for much of his thinking on the subject of government, we must consider what faith Rush placed in the common man and to what extent he believed man was capable of self-government. Like many of his contemporaries, Rush speculated constantly on man's essential nature. He agreed with John Adams that God created man for society. "I grant," he emphasized, "that man is naturally a domestic, a social, and a political or national animal."[83] Yet he did not have--as we might expect from

[83]Adams, Sept. 6, 1809, Letters, II, 1019. To secure his point, he added "that Horace's line is in general true, 'naturam expellas furca, tanen usque recurrit [Though you drive out nature with a fork, it will incessantly return]'" (Ibid., II, 1019, 1021 n. 6). See also Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096. Adams noted that "Men, in their primitive conditions, however savage, were undoubtedly gregarious; and they continue to be social, not only in every stage of civilization but in every possible situation in which they can be placed" (The Works of John Adams, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1850-1856), VI, 232.

his belief in man's gregarious nature--an unqualified faith in man's ability to govern himself. His belief in man's natural depravity largely explains why he did not. Like Adams, who had "perfect knowledge of human nature,"[84] Rush viewed human nature in skeptical, pessimistic terms. "Indeed, so consonant is frailty with everything that belongs to human nature," he wrote, "that it may perhaps be truly said that there is something radically wrong in that man who . . . has never erred."[85]

Inevitably, this concept of human depravity colored his political thinking. Believing that political events such as the American Revolution demonstrated "the weakness and folly of human nature,"[86] Rush concluded that not only were "men entrusted with power" receptacles of depravity but "the people do not part with their full proportions of it." "Reason and revelation," he explained to David Ramsay in 1788, "both deceive us if they are all wise and virtuous." Indeed, was not history as much a record of the vices of the people as the crimes of kings? Did not the immoral character of the citizens of the United States prove "too plainly" that the people were as

[84]Richard Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 387.

[85]Adams, Aug. 22, 1806, Letters, II, 927. "We not only repeat the errors of other people though warned by their confessions to avoid them, but we repeat errors in spite of our own experience and even our own sufferings from them" (Adams, July 11, 1806, Letters, II, 923).

[86]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545.

politically depraved as rulers?[87] On one occasion, he confessed bitterly to Adams "that during the whole of my political life I was always disposed to suspect my integrity if from any accident I became popular with our citizens for a few weeks or days."[88] His conviction of political depravity, moreover, increased rather than diminished as he grew older. As he summed it up to Adams, in the accents of Jonathan Swift:

> But, my friend, why blot paper with any more records of the folly and wickedness of man? Were I compelled to write a history of any of the human race, it should be of my lunatic patients in the Hospital. There I should find folly only, for most of them are innocent and some of them amiable. There is not a French Jacobin, nor a visionary Democrat, nor an Essex Junto man, nor a priest deranged with Federalism or Democracy, nor a governor compounding praying and fasting with party politics, among them all.[89]

Rush attempted to explain man's evil political nature in several ways--in terms of environmentalism, biology, mental disease, and theology. Using Lockean psychological theory, Rush suggested that the economic and political environment helped to determine man's depravity. He was convinced that bank foreclosures not only were "preparing our citizens for a new form of government," but were "converting independent freeholders into obsequious and venal electors."[90] He attributed the weaknesses and vices of

[87]Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454.

[88]Adams, Feb. 12, 1790, Letters, I, 530-531.

[89]Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1153.

[90]Adams, Dec. 21, 1810, Letters, II, 1073.

the common people "in part to the errors and corruptions of our government."[91] Moreover, the natural, predatory instinct in man, he believed, partly explained his political venality. Basing his views on the biological fact that man destroyed his own kind, Rush concluded that rulers who possessed absolute power were essentially carnivorous, and that without controls over the people's conduct, nothing could "prevent their degenerating into savages or devouring each other like beasts of prey."[92]

Added to his concept of man's cannibalism as a source of political depravity was Rush's growing suspicion that politics was a form of mental illness, that the electorate was mad. "Is there no method," he asked Adams,

> of infecting persons with madness in order to prevent their being offended and distressed with the madness of their friends and the public? Nat. Lee the poet was asked in a cell in Bethlehem hospital "what brought him there." He answered, "He had said the world was mad, but that the world had said the same thing of him, and that he had been outvoted by the fools and knaves and madmen of our country."[93]

[91]Horatio Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 76. In his Oration on Indian medicine, Rush observed that though he was "not one of those modern philosophers, who derive the vices of mankind from the influence of civilization," he did believe "their number and malignity increase with the refinements of polished life" ("Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 272).

[92]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 73; David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454. Considering Napoleon as a perfect example of man controlled by predatory instincts, Rush prayed that God would free the human race from "the fangs of this beast of prey" (Adams, Aug. 24, 1808, Letters, II, 974).

[93]Adams, Mar. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 997.

Hence Rush "kept from feeling the anger and contempt" that political factionalism created "by considering our citizens as deranged upon the subject of their political and physical happiness."[94]

If madness, predatory instincts, and environment fed the mainstream of political depravity, its chief source, Rush believed, was the Calvinistic concept of innate human depravity, the consequence of man's original sin. However varied Rush's explanations were for depravity, he always returned to the Biblical one as primary:

> In the clamors which have been excited lately against commerce, I have been led to consider the absurdity of deriving human depravity from any other source than that recorded in the Bible. It has been ascribed not only to commoners, but to kings, to different forms of government, to the clergy, and by Ruisseau [sic] and some members of the legislature of Pennsylvania to science and to colleges. Legislation founded upon any one of these opinions must necessarily be erroneous and productive of misery. In the Bible alone man is described as he is.[95]

As Rush summed it up, "Man is indeed fallen! He discovers

[94]Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 901.

[95]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993. "It is somewhat remarkable that in none of the works of the primitive fathers or reformers do we find plans for perpetual and universal peace. They know too well what was in man to believe it possible in his present weak and depraved state. Such plans have been suggested chiefly by infidels and atheists, who ascribe all that is evil in man to religion and bad governments" (Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1168). Rush's statement is ironical in view of his own "Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 19-23.

it every day in domestic, in social, and in political life."[96]

Convinced of the essential depravity of man in government, Rush considered its implications for his general political theory. Since the electorate was "the meanest of people," since "a large portion of our citizens are ignorant, and an equal portion are idle and intemperate,"[97] Rush, agreeing with Adams, concluded that governmental restraining power was necessary in order to limit the political power of the people. The people at large, he argued in 1777, were not qualified to review magistrates, to judge laws, or to check legislative power, for such direct participation in government by the people "proceeds upon the supposition that mankind are all alike wise, and just. . . ."[98] Nor could they resist the influence of the wealthy few, he contended, laying the fault once again "upon human nature."[99] In fine, man was not capable of unrestricted self-government--as he told Adams, man "can be governed . . . only by accommodating law to his nature" as described by the Bible.[100]

[96]Adams, Apr. 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545. Pessimistic over the Hamiltonian funding plan at this time, Rush concluded that science and government were employed in vain to cure man's depravity. "Christianity is alone equal to this business" (Ibid.).

[97]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 190, Oct. 12, 1790; Adams, June 29, 1805, Letters, II, 898.

[98]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[99]Ibid., p. 62.

[100]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993.

Nevertheless, as an heir of the 17th-century liberal British tradition and its deep hatred of tyranny and as a participant in a successful revolt against oppressive rule, Rush subscribed to the importance of the people's liberty. Man was worth something; he was not totally depraved.[101] There was benevolence as well as depravity in human nature, Rush declared[102]; there were "fragments of good" in the meanest of men; ". . . there never was a soul so completely shipwrecked by vice that something divine was not saved from its wreck."[103] Thus Rush, taking a somewhat balanced view of human nature, was faced with an unavoidable dilemma: though men were predatory and depraved, self interested and contentious, yet they counted for something. Like James Madison and Jeremy Belknap, he felt it was indispensable that the people should have a voice, even if not an altogether trustworthy one. The essence of the problem, as Rush saw it, was that "I love the people but would sooner be banished . . . than gain their favor by accommodating to one of their unjust popular prejudices."[104]

[101]Nye, p. 102.

[102]Rebecca Smith, July 1, 1791, Letters, I, 585.

[103]Thomas Eddy, Oct. 19, 1803, Letters, II, 875.

[104]Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514. "I still love the common people," he wrote Horatio Gates, "with all their weaknesses and vices . . ." (Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 768).

Perhaps, thought Rush, education was the way out of the dilemma. Properly educated, men could participate in government wisely and justly. Addressing the citizens of Philadelphia in 1787, Rush explained the necessity of educating the common man for government:

> To a people enlightened in the principles of liberty and Christianity, arguments, it is to be hoped, will be unnecessary to persuade them to adopt these necessary and useful institutions [free schools]. The children of poor people form a great proportion of all communities. Their ignorance and vices when neglected are not confined to themselves; they associate with and contaminate the children of persons in the higher ranks of society. Thus they assist after they arrive at manhood in choosing the rulers who govern the whole community. They give a complexion to the morals and manners of the people. In short, where the common people are ignorant and vicious, a nation, and above all a republican nation, can never be long free and happy. It becomes us, therefore, as we love our offspring and value the freedom and prosperity of our country, immediately to provide for the education of the poor children. . . .[105]

Thus Rush maintained a qualified faith in majority rule--as he expressed it: "In the uncultivated state of reason, the opinions and beliefs of a majority of mankind will be wrong. In the cultivated state of reason, just opinions and feelings will become general."[106]

In summary, any analysis of Rush's political philosophy that fails to consider the political implications of Rush's complex view of human nature is incomplete. His

[105]"To the Citizens of Philadelphia," Mar. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 413.

[106]Macklin Thomas, "The Idea of Progress in the Writings of Franklin, Freneau, Barlow, and Rush" (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1938), p. 236--quoted in Nye, p. 103.

belief in the inherent depravity of the human species is deeply imbedded in his political thinking; it accounts for his conviction--in spite of his love of the common man--that government must restrain man's erring passions. "The perfection of government," Rush asserted, "consists in providing restraints against the tyranny of rulers on the one hand and the licentiousness of the people on the other."[107] Only through governmental restraints and free education could man realize his political happiness.

[107]Adams, Oct. 12, 1779, Letters, I, 240.

III. Rush's Basic Political Philosophy

Armed with the thinking of some of the best European and American minds on the subject of government, thoroughly committed to the philosophy of political science, grounded in Newtonian physics and natural history, and tempered with an insight into the fallen nature of man, Benjamin Rush developed a theory of free government compounded of simple and complex elements. As Rush defined it:

> It is one thing to understand the principles, and another thing to understand the forms of government. The former are simple; the latter are difficult and complicated. There is the same difference between principles and forms in all other sciences. Who understood the principles of mechanics and optics better than Sir Isaac Newton? and yet Sir Isaac could not for his life have made a watch or a microscope.[108]

Continuing his analogy between government and science, he noted that "a few simple elementary bodies compose all the matter of the universe, and yet how infinitely are they combined in the various forms and substances which they assume in the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. In a like manner a few simple principles enter into the composition of all free governments." Though few and simple, Rush explained, they "admit of extensive combinations, when reduced to practice"; in fact, "they require them." To illustrate the dangers of simple forms of government, he

[108]"Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 78.

pointed out that "a despotic government is the most simple government in the world, but instead of affording security to property, liberty or life, it obliges us to hold them all on the simple will of a capricious sovereign." Thus all governments were "safe and free," he concluded, "in proportion as they are compounded in a certain degree, and on the contrary, . . . all governments are dangerous and tyrannical in proportion as they approach to simplicity."[109]

The union of simple principles and complex forms of government, then, formed the basis of Rush's political theory. The basic principle of a constitutional government, he believed, was that it was "instituted only for our happiness"[110]; its object was to provide "perfect security for property, liberty and life"--that is, for natural rights.[111] Rush admired the new Federal Constitution, therefore, because its principles, or ends, of government were simple and few, because it "establishes justice, insures order, cherishes virtue, secures property, and protects from every species of violence."[112]

Though the promotion of the "happiness of society, and the safety and well being of civil government" formed the cornerstone of Rush's theory of free government, the

[109]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 60.

[110]John Dunlap, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 230.

[111]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 60.

[112]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454.

application of these principles required complex forms.[113] In Rush's Observations upon the Present Government of Pennsylvania (1777), he developed at length a theory of free government that distinguished between simple principles and the diversity of forms needed to execute them. A free government, Rush reasoned, consisted of three interrelated parts: the bill of rights, the constitution, and laws. At the base of the hierarchy was the bill of rights, containing the "great principles of natural and civil liberty,"--principles that were "unalterable by any human power." Next, the constitution, as the "executive part" of the bill of rights, contained "the division and distribution" of the people's power, "the modes and forms of making laws, of executing justice, and of transacting business," and the limitation "as to time and jurisdiction" of the powers granted to government. "Unalterable by the legislature," it could be amended "only by a representation of the people, chosen for that purpose." Even the "most perfect Constitution," Rush felt, needed "occasional alterations" because of the inevitable course of events and shifts in the "dispositions of a people." Finally, laws functioned as the "executive part of a constitution." If they transgressed "the principles of Liberty" contained in the constitution and bill of rights, they no longer were binding.[114]

[113]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88.

[114]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 54, 77.

Thus the structure of free government, in Rush's theory, moved from the declaration of "simple" principles in the bill of rights, to the compounded forms necessary to implement these principles in the constitution and laws. In emphasizing the limitations and the distribution of political power, Rush's theory of government recognized the need to control and restrain the natural depravity of the people and their rulers. By implication, of course, Rush's philosophy of free government also embodied the 18th-century compact theory--government formed by agreement of the people in order to secure natural rights.[115] As a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Rush assented to these concepts as well as to the right of revolution--that is, the right to abolish or alter governments become despotic by subverting the people's natural rights. In 1774 he indicated his acceptance of this principle when he declared that governments which had "departed entirely" from their essential principles "are to be cured by nothing but an entire renovation of their constitution."[116]

Moreover, Rush's general political theory reflected his belief that the structure of government should be analagous to the form and harmony of the orderly universe.

[115]Rush considered the Constitution of the United States a "compact" ("To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 466).

[116]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 283.

For example, he stressed the division of free government into three parallelled, interdependent parts, as well as "the division and distribution" of political power in the constitution itself--that is, his concept of separate, balanced, and mutually checked powers. Thus when speaking of "difficult and complicated" forms of government, Rush did not have a formless, chaotic institution in mind, but rather one modeled after the perfect symmetry, intricacy, order, and efficiency of the universe. In contrast to free government, the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, Rush pointed out, lacked "style," "forms of business," and proper "distribution of the supreme power of the state." Deficient in "perspicuity and method," failing to separate the legislative, executive, and judicial parts into "distinct heads," it was "jumbled together in a most unsystematic manner."[117] In short, it failed to meet the "scientific" standards of Rush's political theory. In summary, Rush's general theory of free government was based on four premises: first, the distinction between simple principles and complex forms of government; second, the recognition and control of political depravity; third, the Lockean concept of the social compact; and fourth, the harmony and order of the Newtonian universe.

Before we consider the specific forms of government Rush thought most effectively and least effectively secured

[117]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 55-56.

the simple principles of government, we should briefly note Rush's awareness of the difficulty of translating theory into practice. Far from a naive idealist, Rush set down his general theory of constitutional government specifically to demonstrate how far the Pennsylvania Constitution missed the mark. It failed on no less than six counts. First of all, it failed to take into account "the ancient habits and customs of the people of Pennsylvania" in the distribution of power, by placing all of it--legislative, executive, and judicial--in a single legislature. Second, it overlooked the weakness of human nature. Third, it contained things that properly belonged in the bill of rights or in the laws. Fourth, the constitution conflicted with the bill of rights on the matter of religious freedom. Fifth, it failed to separate the powers of government into independent branches. Sixth, it provided inadequately for amendments.[118] Even the new Federal Constitution, at first praised as "the freest, purest, and happiest government upon the face of the earth,"[119] Rush eventually considered a failure.[120] As he grew older, his pessimism frequently deepened into a despairing belief that no form

[118]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 55-56. For Rush's detailed examination of the first and fifth points, see Ibid., pp. 57-78.

[119]John Coakley Lettsom, Sept. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 444.

[120]James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 538-539; Adams, June 13, 1808, Letters, II, 966.

of government could realize his basic political goal of man's happiness. At such moments Rush viewed government as chains and rulers as jailers--the inevitable result of the warring, predatory nature of fallen man. As he wrote Adams in 1810:

> Do we not, my friend, mistake the nature of government and the business and rank of the men who rule us? Was not government one of the causes of the fall of man? And were not laws intended to be our chains? Of course. Are not our rulers who make and execute those laws nothing but jailers, turnkeys, and Jack Ketches of a higher order? We give them titles, put them into palaces, and decorate them with fine clothes only to conceal the infamy of their offices. As labor, parturition, and even death itself (the other curses of the Fall) have been converted by the goodness of God into blessings, so government and rulers have in some instances become blessings to mankind. But this does not exempt them from the charge which I have brought against them. Let us do what we will to meliorate our government and to choose wise rulers, we cannot frustrate the designs of heaven. The former will always carry in their construction marks of their being other forms only of jails, stocks, whipping posts, cells, and dungeons, and the latter will always exhibit, notwithstanding the disguise of their titles, palaces, and dresses, the insignia of the offices I have already ascribed to them.[121]

[121]Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1034-1035. For a discussion of the role of the concept of the predatory nature of the human species in Jeffersonian political science, see Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 171-185.

IV. Rush's Analysis of Political Despotism

Before considering the form of government Rush believed most beneficial to the general happiness of the people, we shall examine the forms he thought least beneficial. It was axiomatic to Rush that any government which destroyed man's natural right to life, liberty, and property and threatened the mental and physical health of society[122] was despotic, and that uncontrolled power possessed by any individual or group was the surest avenue to that despotism--the most "dangerous to the safety and liberties of the community."[123] Absolute power, wrote Rush,

> should never be trusted to man. It has perverted the wisest heads, and corrupted the best hearts in the world. I should be afraid to commit my property, liberty and life to a body of angels for one whole year. The Supreme Being alone is qualified to possess supreme power over his creatures. It requires the wisdom and goodness of a Deity to control, and direct it properly.[124]

Rush derived his concept that unchecked power corrupts from his belief that man was a carnivorous and selfish

[122] Rush, in "Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 165, noted that the despotism of the Turkish government not only weakened the understanding but annihilated the life-sustaining stimili produced by domestic and public affections.

[123] "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 57.

[124] Ibid., p. 57. "Absolute, unc[onditional power] should belong only to God," said Rush. "It requires wisdom and goodness to direct it" (Anthony Wayne, May 19, 1777, Letters, I, 148).

creature--a view he shared with many Jeffersonians and Federalists alike.[125] "Men possessed of unlimited and uncontrolled power," Rush observed in 1777, "are beasts of prey."[126] The inevitable conclusion drawn from the biological fact of man's destruction of his own kind and the theological fact of the consequences of the Fall, Rush's pessimistic view of human nature thus led him quite naturally to view all rulers as "naturally disposed" to corruption.[127] Using Napoleon as a specific example, Rush asserted that "Rulers become tyrants and butchers from instinct much oftener than from imitation."[128]

[125]For the implications of this view of human nature for Jeffersonian political philosophy, see Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 173-181. "It seems to be the law of our general nature," Jefferson wrote in 1787, "in spite of individual exceptions; and experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind; for I can apply no milder term to the governments of Europe, and to the general prey of the rich on the poor" (The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh (Washington, 1903-1904), VI, 58: To Edward Carrington, Jan. 16, 1787, quoted in Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 177). He observed again in 1797: "In truth I do not recollect in all the animal kingdom a single species but man which is eternally and systematically engaged in the destruction of its own species" (Writings, IX, 359: To Madison, Jan. 1, 1797, quoted in Boorstin, p. 174). The Federalist John Adams used human depravity as one of the basic premises of A Defence of the Constitutions. . . . Boorstin, p. 179, suggests that one of the reasons why the Jeffersonian did not develop a concept of "the survival of the fittest," and did not "explicitly idealize power and the predatory talents" of man was his strong humanitarianism. Boorstin cites Rush's humanitarianism as his prime example.

[126]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 73.

[127]"To the Citizens of Pennsylvania of German Birth and Extraction," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 367.

[128]Adams, Dec. 21, 1810, Letters, II, 1073.

Given man's predatory instincts, then, naked power--its inescapable consequence--would corrupt the freest of governments, unless measures were taken not only to control man's depravity but also to distribute political power. Rush reiterated these dangers to America throughout his life. Restraints were necessary in government, he wrote to Anthony Wayne, because power is "apt . . . to become arbitrary."[129] He would have agreed with Jefferson's insight into the dangers of unlimited power in the Virginian Constitution of 1776:

> Mankind soon learn to make interested uses of every right and power which they possess, or may assume. . . . With money we will get men, said Caesar, and with men we will get money. Nor should our assembly be deluded by the integrity of their own purposes, and conclude that these unlimited powers will never be abused, because themselves are not disposed to abuse them. They should look forward to a time, and that not a distant one, when a corruption in this, as in the country from which we derive our origin, will have seized the heads of government, and be spread by them through the body of the people; when they will purchase the voices of the people, and make them pay the price. Human nature is the same on every side of the Atlantic, and will be alike influenced by the same causes. The time to guard against corruption and tyranny, is before they shall have gotten hold of us. It is better to keep the wolf out of the fold, then to trust to drawing his teeth and claws after he shall have entered.[130]

Rush analyzed the evils of concentrating power in a single legislature in the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776

[129]Anthony Wayne, Sept. 24, 1776, Letters, I, 115.

[130]Writings, II, 164-165, quoted in Boorstin, pp. 178-179.

in the same manner. To prove his contention that the Pennsylvania Constitution laid "a foundation . . . for the most complete aristocracy that ever existed in the world," he premised

> two propositions, which have never been controverted: First, where there is wealth, there will be power; and, secondly, the rich have always been an over-match for the poor in all contests for power.
>
> These truths being admitted, I desire to know what can prevent our single representation being filled, in the course of a few years, with a majority of rich men? Say not, the people will not choose such men to represent them. The influence of wealth at elections is irresistible. . . . there are poor men among us as prepared to be influenced, as the rich are prepared to influence them. The fault must be laid in both cases upon human nature. The consequence of a majority of rich men getting into the legislature is plain. Their wealth will administer fuel to the love of arbitrary power that is common to all men.[131]

From English Parliament's detested Stamp Act in 1765 to corruption in Continental Congress, from Hamilton's fiscal policies in the 1790's to the War of 1812, Rush constantly warned that unconditional power and the influence of wealth led "to the necessity of more arbitrary government than by fixed laws and constitutions" and applauded "noble endeavors

[131]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 62-63. Rush also attacked the provision in the Pennsylvania Constitution which granted arbitrary, uncontrolled power to a council of censors for one year: "Innocence has nothing to fear from justice, when it flows through the regular channels of law; but where is the man who can ensure himself a moment's safety from a body of men invested with absolute power for one whole year to censure and condemn, without judge or jury, every individual in the State" (Ibid., p. 75).

to put a stop to arbitrary power."[132]

In the following pages we shall consider Rush's views on the forms of government which released man's destructive passions, created uncontrolled political power, and consequently, produced tyranny. We shall see that Rush rejected these political institutions because they either destroyed the social "health" of the community or, as in the case of democracy, so weakened the political body that it could not resist the poisons of monarchy or dictatorship.

Of governments harmful to the general welfare, Benjamin Rush reserved a special hatred for monarchy; as he told General Horatio Gates in 1781, "a friend to monarchy (under any name or shape) is a traitor in the worst sense of the word. . . ."[133] "History," he observed in 1777, "is little else than a recital of the follies and vices of kings and noblemen. . . ."[134]

He firmly believed that this evil political system--marked by "the folly and pageantry of animals in the shape

[132]Ebenezer Hazard, Nov. 8, 1765, Letters, I, 18; John Dunlap, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 235. On the ill effects of the Funding System, see "Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 200. Note also Rush to William Gordon, Dec. 10, 1778, Letters, I, 221: "Our Congress begin already to talk of state necessity and of making justice yield in some cases to policy."

[133]Gates, June 12, 1781, Letters, I, 264. He wrote Gates in 1794 that he "sincerely abhors all dramatic representations of royalty in the United States" (Gates, Mar. 23, 1794, Letters, II, 748.

[134]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 62.

of man cringing at the feet of an animal called a king"[135]--was a mental disorder, "a leprosy of the mind" that threatened the "health" of the state.[136] Monarchy, Rush wrote in his journal, corrupted "all the powers of the mind": the understanding with ideas of divine right, passive obedience, kingly wisdom and perfection; the affections with absolute devotion to kings and nobles to the neglect of country; manners with notions of despotism in schools and families; morals with servility, idleness, insincerity, seduction; and language with formal, instead of familiar, pronouns.[137]

In his essay "On the Different Species of Mania," Rush, defining mania as "a want of perception, or an undue perception of truth, duty, or interest," discussed the monarchical mania:

> All those people who believe that "a king can do no wrong," and who hold it to be criminal to depose tyrants, are affected with this mania. They are likewise affected with this species of mania, who suppose that wise and just government cannot be carried on without kings. A young Scotch officer discovered an extraordinary degree of this madness in a speech he made to an American prisoner during the late American war. "This is (said he) the strangest rebellion I ever heard of in au my life. Ye are au fighting, and yet have na king to fight for." He had no idea that men had any property in themselves, or that it was right for them to contend, by arms, for any thing, but

[135]Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 192.

[136]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 198, June 10, 1791.

[137]Ibid., pp. 197-198, June 10, 1791.

the power or glory of a king.[138]

During the Revolution, those sympathetic to monarchy, he noted, frequently suffered from "revolutiana," a disease affecting mind and body and often proving fatal.[139]

Hopefully Rush looked to "a general insurrection of the reason and virtue of man" to cure the malady--to eliminate kings "from the face of the earth" so that it would be necessary to exhibit crowns and scepters to prove "such cannibals" ever existed.[140] Yet at soberer moments Rush realized that "such cannibals" were only a symptom of a deeper, more pervasive problem, that of human depravity. "An hundred years hence," he confessed pessimistically to Adams, "absolute monarchy will probably be rendered necessary in our country by the corruption of our people."[141]

In particular, Rush attacked the basis for power in monarchy, the concept of divine right. The idea of divine right, it seemed to Rush, demonstrated the evil effects of monarchy upon human understanding.[142] By implication his use of the compact theory questioned divine right as the source of political sovereignty, though it did not openly criticize the concept. If sovereignty was derived

[138]"On Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 214.

[139]"Influence of the American Revolution," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 332.

[140]Jefferson, Feb. 4, 1797, Letters, II, 785.

[141]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

[142]"1789-1791," p. 197, June 10, 1791.

from the people, the king was hardly God's chosen. But elsewhere Rush directly challenged the idea of a king's divine right to absolute power. "The history of the creation of man," he asserted, "and of the relation of our species to each other by birth, which is recorded in the Old Testament, is the best refutation that can be given to the divine right of kings. . . ."[143] True principles of government, he maintained, "teach us the absurdity of the divine origin of kingly power."

Furthermore, capital punishment was "the natural offspring" of the divine right theory of monarchy, for, Rush reasoned, "kings believe that they possess their crowns by a divine right: no wonder, therefore, they assume the divine power of taking away human life. Kings consider their subjects as their property: no wonder, therefore, they shed their blood with as little emotion as men shed the blood of their sheep or cattle."[144] Rush's visit to Versailles in 1769 confirmed his views on the "absurdity" of divine right--as his satiric portrait of King Louis XV of France revealed:

> Let such as maintain the Divine Right of Kings come and behold this Monarch, setting on a couch with a common prostitute, picked up a few years ago from the streets of Paris, or let them follow him in his Forrests [sic] and there behold

[143]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88.

[144]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 52.

> him sporting with the death of a fox or stag, and then let them declare if they can, that they believe him to be the Lord Anointed: It is Blasphemy itself to suppose that God ever gave an absolute command over 18 millions of his creatures, for this is the number of inhabitants of France, to a man like Louis the 15th.[145]

Rush used several arguments to prove that monarchy was an ineffective form of government. First of all, turning to natural history for evidence, he suggested that monarchy was an unhealthy, "diseased" state. Hence he told Adams that "a king or a senator not chosen by the people at certain periods becomes . . . an abscess in the body politic which must sooner or later destroy the healthiest state."[146] Second, he argued that monarchy failed to harmonize with the Newtonian order of the universe; ". . . I consider hereditary monarchy and aristocracy," he wrote Adams, "as rebellion against nature. . . ."[147] Third, monarchy was not, he believed, the compounded form necessary for safety and freedom; rather, it was a simple form which held the subject's property, liberty, or life "on the simple will of a capricious sovereign."[148] Fourth, it was against

[145]"On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, p. 391. Rush recorded in his autobiography an anecdote he heard from John Wilkes which best summed up for Rush the principles of French monarchy. Wilkes told him "that he once dined with twelve gentlemen in Paris, eleven of whom declared they should think it their duty to surrender up their wives to the lust of the King if he desired them" ("Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 71).

[146]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

[147]Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514.

[148]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 60.

reason; as Rush observed, titles, the result of monarchic thinking, "are . . . contrary to reason. . . ."[149] Fifth, a monarchic government was incompatible with Christianity. The antipathy between them, he contended, was understandable because "the pride of monarchy and the servility of that state which it induces in all its subjects are alike contrary to the humility and dignity of the Christian character. It is the Spirit of the Gospel (though unacknowledged) which is now rooting monarchy out of the world."[150] Thus Rush opposed monarchy on natural, rational, and religious grounds.

Since aristocracy was a necessary corollary to monarchy, Rush was equally vehement against pretensions to hereditary wealth and titles. If monarchy caused "the wickedness of primogeniture," Rush reasoned, then it in turn produced a nobility whose descendants were idle and whose land was uncultivated, a hereditary aristocracy whose character Rush found completely contemptible.[151] In his commonplace book, he analyzed the aristocratic concept of "gentleman" in satiric terms:

> Westly [Wesley] forbids his preachers to affect to be, or even appear like gentlemen, and indeed when we consider how that word is abused

[149]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 524.

[150]Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1792, Letters, I, 620. "The spirit [of Christianity]," he told Jefferson, "is opposed, not only to the splendor, but even to the very forms of monarchy. . . ." (Jefferson, Aug. 22, 1800, Letters, II, 820).

[151]"1789-1791," p. 199, June 10, 1791.

> in the world it is no wonder he gave such advice. A man who has been bred a gentlemen cannot work, "Dig he cannot," and he will not ask for charity, "for to beg he is ashamed," and therefore he lives by borrowing without intending to pay, or upon the public or his friends. A gentleman cannot wait upon himself, and therefore his ~~hands~~ and his legs are often as useless to him as if they were paralytic. If a merchant be a gentleman he would sooner lose 50 customers than be seen to carry a piece of goods across the street. If a Doctor should chance to be a gentleman he would rather let a patient die than assist in giving him a glyster or in bleeding him. If a parson he loses his zeal etc. If a tradesman should happen to be a gentleman he is undone for ever, by entertaining company, by a country seat, or by wishing to secure the society and good will of gentlemen by trusting them. In a word, to be a gentleman subjects one to the necessity of resenting injuries, fighting duels and the like, and takes away all disgrace in swearing, getting drunk, running in debt, getting bastards, etc. It makes nothing infamous but giving or taking the lye, for however much gentlemen pretend to be men of their word, they are the greatest lyers in the world. They lie to their creditors, to their mistresses, to their fathers or wives, or to the public.[152]

It was no wonder, then, that Rush wrote his son James that he would not "exchange his labors for the independent situation of any idle, sauntering, purse-proud citizen of Philadelphia."[153] When Rush congratulated John Adams' election to the joint-commission to France in 1777, he revealed his contempt for nobility. He was confident that Adams' honesty would "baffle" the "servants of despotism" who "wear the 'volto Sciolto' with the 'pensieri Stretti'

[152]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 224-225, July 21, 1792.

[153]James Rush, Mar. 29, 1803, Letters, II, 860.

of Lord Chesterfield." Integrity, knowledge, and prudence, Rush felt, were vastly superior to "dressing, powdering, and bowing well as necessary accomplishments for an ambassador. . . ."[154]

Rush's dislike of aristocracy colored his attitude toward titles too. He could not agree with Adams "that titles overawe or restrain the profligate part of a community." London, he argued, proved that titles failed to prevent corrupt manners. "The use of titles," he continued, "begets pride in rulers and baseness among the common people. . . . They are equally contrary to reason and religion, and in my opinion are no more necessary to give dignity or energy to a government than swearing is to govern a ship's crew, or spirituous liquors to gather in the fruits of the earth."[155] "Every man who values himself upon his birth--titles, or wealth, more than upon merit," declared Rush, suffered from the madness known as "the pride mania."[156] Aristocracy, then, because it emphasized

[154]Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 190. Chesterfield wrote his son, Oct. 19, O.S. 1748, that "The height of abilities is, to have volto sciolto and pensieri stretti; that is, a frank, open, and ingenuous exterior, with a prudent and reserved interior; to be upon your own guard, and yet, by a seeming natural openness, to put people off theirs" (Letters, ed. Bonamy Dobree, London, 1932, IV, 1248, quoted in Letters, I, 192 n. 2).

[155]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523-524. Rush, in his commonplace book, noted that "titles which belong to monarchy and aristocracy are like ear rings and nose jewels among Indians" ("1789-1791," p. 198).

[156]"On Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 217.

inequality, idleness, pride, and titles, endangered the new nation. To combat the influence of hereditary monopolies of land and, therefore, to guard against this inroad for monarchy, Rush encouraged the development of commerce and the division of estates.[157]

Certain political, social, and economic conditions in the United States, Rush warned, made the danger of monarchy a constant one. Based on the assumption that wealth equals power, he argued in 1777 that the wealthy elite would soon control the unicameral legislature in Pennsylvania and pave the way for aristocratic and monarchic power in the state.[158] The Americans' tendency to hero worship, Rush thought in 1789, accelerated "the progress of our government towards monarchy." Though he ascribed independence and the new federal government to many patriots, he feared that most Americans wanted "but <u>one</u> deliverer, <u>one</u> great, or <u>one</u> good man in our country."[159] Economic factors, such as public debt, also moved America closer to monarchy, Rush believed.[160] He bitterly opposed Hamilton's funding plan largely because he was convinced that it would "lay the foundation of an aristocracy in our

[157]"Mode of Education," 1798, <u>Selected Writings</u>, p. 94; "1789-1791," p. 199.

[158]"Observations," 1777, <u>Selected Writings</u>, pp. 62-63.

[159]Adams, June 4, 1789, <u>Letters</u>, I, 514.

[160]Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1792, <u>Letters</u>, I, 620.

country."[161] War, Rush thought, also carried with it "the seeds of hereditary power."[162] He firmly believed, then, that only time would erase the remnants of monarchy in America--as he put it to Horatio Gates:

> It will require half a century to cure us of all our monarchical habits and prejudices. At present we are Roman Catholics in government. A pope in religion and a king in power are equally necessary articles with many people. . . . Our republican forms of government will in time beget republican opinions and manners.[163]

Thus Rush's arguments against monarchy and the theory of divine right were based primarily on his belief that this "diseased" political institution failed to secure the well-being of the community. Only an awareness of and a vigilance over the conditions that nurtured monarchy and aristocracy would protect America from the "monarchical mania."

"In our opposition to monarchy," thought Rush, in probing into the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, "we forgot that the temple of tyranny has two doors. We bolted one of them by proper restraints: but we left the other open, by neglecting to guard against the effects

[161]James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 539. "It will change," he added, "the property of nine-tenths of the freeholders of the States, and it will be a lasting monument of the efficacy of idleness, speculation, and fraud above industry, economy, and integrity in obtaining wealth and independence" (Ibid.).

[162]Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1792, Letters, I, 620.

[163]Gates, Sept. 5, 1781, Letters, I, 265.

of our own ignorance and licentiousness."[164] If monarchy, as a "simple" form of government, was a source of despotism, democracy, also a "simple" form, was an equal, if not greater, source of tyranny--in this case, of licentious anarchy. Democracy, as "a simple popular government," "with only one branch," Rush maintained, was merely a synonym for "mobocracy."[165] In his attack on the Pennsylvania Constitution, he observed that absolute power lodged in one body of men was more dangerous to the safety and freedom of the state than complete power given to a single individual. Even to "a body of angels" Rush would not "commit my property, liberty and life" for one year.[166]

The immediate danger of pure democracy, then, was that, lacking proper safeguards, it quickly disintegrated into anarchy. Restraints, Rush felt, were as necessary in a democracy as in a monarchy, for in a government "too much upon the democratic order," freedom "is as apt to degenerate into licentiousness as power is to become arbitrary."[167]

[164]"On the Defects of the Confederation," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 26.

[165]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454; Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523; Charles Lee, Oct. 24, 1779, Letters, I, 244.

[166]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 57. "I had rather live under the government of one man than of 72," Rush wrote Anthony Wayne. "They will soon become like the 3[0 Tyrants of] Athens" (Wayne, May 19, 1777, Letters, 148).

[167]Wayne, Sept. 24, 1776, Letters, I, 115. Such governments thus lacked "safety, wisdom, and dignity" (Ibid.).

Moreover, the "monster" anarchy contained yet another "tyrant in his bowels": "All history shows us that the people soon grow weary of the folly and tyranny of one another. They prefer one to many masters, and stability to instability of slavery. They prefer a Julius Caesar to a Senate, and a Cromwell to a perpetual Parliament."[168] A simple democracy was indeed, Rush observed, "a volcano that contained within its bowels the fiery materials of its own destruction."[169] For the nation to court a simple democracy, therefore, would be to invite anarchy immediately and eventually, monarchy or dictatorship.

Firmly convinced, then, that "A simple democracy . . . is one of the greatest of evils,"[170] Rush analyzed why mass popular rule failed to achieve political happiness. In the first place, the simplicity of democracy, with its single governing body and undistributed powers, fell into Rush's category of governments "dangerous and tyrannical in

[168]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71. John Adams wrote that monarchy is ". . . the eternal resource of every ignorant people, harassed with democratical distractions. . . ." (The Works of John Adams, ed. Charles Francis Adams, Boston, 1850-1856, IV, 347).

[169]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454. Rush attributed this saying to the Federalist leader Fisher Ames. Adams also noted that democracy "soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide" (John Adams to John Taylor, The Works of John Adams, VI, 484).

[170]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523. Rush was fond of quoting John Jubly's statement that "a democracy is the devil's own government" (David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454; Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523).

proportion as they approach to simplicity," in contrast to those "safe and free in proportion as they are compounded. . . ." Secondly, the democratic philosophy of direct participation by the people "destroys the necessity for all government." The idea that the people ruled themselves overlooked the fact that "Government supposes and requires a delegation of power: It cannot exist without it." Indeed, the primary purpose of a constitution, Rush believed, was to limit, divide, and distribute the powers of the people. The fallacy of democratic thinking, then, was its failure to distinguish between the correct notion that "all power is derived from the people" and the erroneous opinion that it "is seated in the people." What could be "more absurd," Rush asked, "than for the people at large to pretend to give up their power to a set of rulers, and afterward reserve the right of making and of judging of all their laws themselves"? Such monstrous governments, he concluded, contained "as many Governors, Assemblymen, Judges and Magistrates as there are freemen in the State, all exercising the same powers and at the same time."[171]

Thirdly, democracy not only failed to delegate power properly, but it failed to allow for man's corrupt nature--thus its great faith in universal suffrage. The democratic

[171]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 54, 60, 71.

"idea of making the people at large judges of the qualifications necessary for magistrates, or judges of laws, or checks for Assemblies," Rush pointed out, "proceeds upon the supposition that mankind are all alike wise, and just. . . ."[172] Was such a supposition justified? Rush's answer was no:

> . . . are we to consider men entrusted with power as the receptacles of all the depravity of human nature? By no means. The people do not part with their full proportions of it. Reason and revelation both deceive us if they are all wise and virtuous. Is not history as full of the vices of the people as it is of the crimes of kings? What is the present moral character of the citizens of the United States? I need not describe it. It proves too plainly that the people are as much disposed to vice as their rulers, and that nothing but a vigorous and efficient government can prevent their degenerating into savages or devouring each other like beasts of prey.[173]

If man's predatory instincts were true, then, the consequences of democracy and "the cheapness of suffrage"--the consequences of government in "the hands of the young and ignorant and needy part of the community"--were obvious: the lack of respect and obedience for law, and the eventual loss of liberty.[174]

Finally, Rush believed that democracy failed to harmonize with natural law. Its inability to distribute and limit

[172] Ibid., p. 71.

[173] David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454. Butterfield, in Letters, I, 455 n. 1, notes that this letter "was the most conservative moment in BR's entire political evolution."

[174] Adams, Oct. 2, 1810, Letters, II, 1067-1068. Rush, of course, felt that the common man was worth something and deserved an important role in government, but not one without checks.

political power, to control man's passions and self-interest, or to secure natural rights led Rush to characterize it as "a monster in nature."[175] When Rush termed a simple democracy "an unbalanced republic," he hinted of its failure to imitate the perfection of God's natural law--that is, it lacked the necessary stability, order, and balance, as reflected in the Creator's universe, for it to endure.[176]

Not only was democracy judged an "absurdity" before the tribunal of nature, but it was also, from the standpoint of natural history and medical science, a "diseased" institution that seriously threatened the health of the state. Exploring the relationship between political events and physical and mental health in his "Account of the Influence of the American Revolution upon the Human Body," Rush observed that the anarchy released by the Revolution produced a kind of insanity:

> The excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war, produced, in many people, opinions and conduct which could not be removed by reason nor restrained by government. For a while, they threatened to render abortive the goodness of heaven to the United States, in delivering them from the evils of slavery and war. The extensive influence which these opinions had upon the understandings, passions and morals of many of the citizens of the United States, constituted a species of insanity, which I shall take the liberty of distinguishing by the name of Anarchia.[177]

[175]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[176]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

[177]"American Revolution," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 333.

In the essay which analyzed the various kinds of mania, Rush generalized this revolutionary species of madness into "the liberty mania"--a "disease" which "shews itself in visionary ideas of liberty and government." Men infected with such democratic radicalism, he added, "expect liberty without law--government without power--sovereignty without a head--and wars without expense."[178]

Since Rush believed democracy failed to distinguish between the simple principles of government and the compound forms necessary to carry them out, failed to consider human depravity, and failed to embody the principles of natural history and Newtonian physics, he viewed any move toward such a government with alarm. Consequently he opposed the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 because it was "rather too much upon the democratical order. . . ."[179] "They call it a democracy--a mobocracy in my opinion would be more proper," he wrote Charles Lee. "All our laws breathe the

[178]"On Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 213. "They consider industry and its usual consequence, wealth, as the only evils of a state, and ascribe Roman attainments in virtue to those men only, who, by consuming an undue proportion of their time in writing, talking, or debating upon politics, bequeath the maintenance of their families to their country" (Ibid., pp. 213-214). "Do and say what we will," Rush told Adams, "we shall I fear always be outvoted by the fools and knaves and madmen of our country" (Adams, Mar. 2, 1809, Letters, II, 997). For Rush's growing conviction of the people's derangement on the subject of government, see Rush's letters to Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 901; July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1153.

[179]Anthony Wayne, Sept. 24, 1776, Letters, I, 115.

spirit of townmeetings and porter shops."[180] Viewing the Confederation as the apotheosis of the self-destructive tendencies of "simple popular government," Rush praised the new Federal Constitution for saving the nation from "anarchy and slavery."[181]

Rush found, then, political, moral, and scientific arguments to support his belief that a simple democracy was as despotic, as harmful to the state's well-being, as monarchy. Under the democratic Articles of Confederation, the immediate danger for America was anarchy, but the long range threat was monarchy or dictatorship. As a "simple" form of government, democracy, although it might temporarily secure the liberty, safety and welfare of the community, ultimately failed to preserve these "simple principles" of free government.

Having demonstrated that monarchy and democracy destroyed the proper ends of free government, Rush stressed that civil power was vulnerable to military domination.

[180]Charles Lee, Oct. 24, 1779, Letters, I, 244. He told Anthony Wayne that the new constitution "substituted a mob government" for the old proprietary one (Wayne, May 19, 1777, Letters, I, 148). Rush reported to Adams, with considerable pleasure, that he had refused to preside at a town meeting (Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 955). See also his bitter allegorical dream of attending a town meeting that resembled a mad house (Adams, Feb. 20, 1809, Letters, II, 994-996).

[181]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454; Adams, July 2, 1788, Letters, I, 469.

The fear of military power as a source of tyranny punctuates many of Rush's letters and essays, nor was he alone in this fear.[182] Butterfield notes that though such views may seem threadworn to us, "the statesmen of the Revolution, who had a different perspective, devoted much of their eloquence" to such dangers, and the course of the French Revolution, they believed, confirmed their worst fears.[183]

Anti-militarist on principle through Quaker influences,[184] Rush, in one of his earliest political observations, criticized Catharine Macaulay's proposed constitution for Corsica because it gave generals and admirals a vote in the senate. To support his theory that military officers should be excluded from political office, Rush analyzed the dangers of miliary power to free government:

> The strict discipline kept up in armies and navies disposes military gentlemen, above all others, to contract an arbitrary temper, which, when brought into private or civil life, becomes

[182]For Rush's anti-militaristic and pacifist views, see Letters, I, 70-71; 406, 462, 470-471, 492, 540, 542, 621; II, 787, 840, 847-848, 871, 1197-1199.

[183]"Appendix I: Rush and Washington," Letters, II, 1199-1200. See Rush's and John Adams' speeches in Continental Congress against referring the appointment of three major generals to the general officers, February 19, 1777, recorded by Rush in his notebook and printed in Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. Edmund C. Burnett (Washington, 1921-1936), II, 262-263 and S. Weir Mitchell, "Historical Notes of Dr. Benjamin Rush," PMHB, XXVII (April 1903), 10. This republican concept is discussed fully by John C. Miller, Triumph of Freedom, 1775-1783 (Boston, 1948), pp. 238-244.

[184]"Appendix I," Letters, II, 1197-1198.

> disagreeable and is often attended with a good deal of danger. Besides, men who have fought in defense of their country and have endured the hardships of war, naturally claim a superiority over the rest of their countrymen. They feel their own importance, they know how necessary they are to the support of the state, and therefore assume more to themselves than is consistent with a free government. Should they ever be provoked to it, their knowledge in arms and their popularity with the soldiers and the common people would give them great advantages over every other citizen, and would render the transitions from democracy to anarchy, and from anarchy to monarchy, very natural and easy.[185]

The military mind, then, with its arbitrary temper and feelings of superiority, naturally desired uncontrolled power. Coupled with ability in arms and popularity with the masses, military officers could easily assume dictatorial powers. As Rush noted in 1777, under anarchy the people, growing tired of the tyranny of each other, "prefer one to many masters," "prefer a Julius Caesar to a Senate, and a Cromwell to a perpetual Parliament."[186] It was imperative, therefore, that civil government zealously maintain its control over the personnel and conduct of the military establishment.[187]

In addition to the pacifism found in his letters and, in particular, in his essay proposing a national peace

[185]Catharine Macaulay, January 18, 1769, Letters, I, 70. Rush's comments anticipate American constitutional principles (Letters, I, 72 n. 4).

[186]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[187]S. Weir Mitchell, "Historical Notes of Dr. Benjamin Rush," PMHB, XXVII (April 1903), 10.

office,[188] Rush's fear of military despotism led him to view professional standing armies with suspicion, to see them as seedbeds for military ambition and power. He wrote Adams in 1777 that Stark's militia at Bennington demonstrated the superiority of the militia over regulars. "Good general officers," he stressed, "would make an army of six-months men an army of heroes."[189] "When properly commanded and led on speedily to action," he told General Gates in 1778, the militia "are the best troops in the world, especially in a war and country like ours."[190] Because the late war proved "that armies of disciplined, irresistible troops may be formed in a short time out of the peasants of a country," Rush reiterated, in a public letter to ministers, 1788, "it is a mistake to suppose that the defense of liberty requires a well-organized militia in the time of peace."[191] For the same reason--that the Revolution "proves that militia establishments in the time of peace are wholly unnecessary"--he opposed Secretary of War Knox's proposal in 1790 for a national guard, noting that "half the money demanded by General Knox's report spent in establishing free schools . . . would extirpate war

[188]"Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 19-23.

[189]Adams, Oct. 1, 1777, Letters, I, 157.

[190]Horatio Gates, Feb. 4, 1778, Letters, I, 198-199.

[191]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 462.

forever from the United States."[192]

Rush's conviction that military fame and power threatened free government, that it rendered the transition to dictatorship all too easy, largely explains his hostility to General Washington.[193] Among the reasons Rush recorded in his pocket notebook on April 8, 1777, for his growing dissatisfaction with Washington's leadership was the following: "Because he is idolized by the people of America and is thought absolutely necessary for us to enable us to carry on with the war."[194] Butterfield comments on the significance of this entry:

> The fourth reason in Rush's list--popular idolatry of Washington--reflects the mingled fear and jealousy with which the civil leaders of the new nation regarded the growth of a great military reputation. These self-conscious republicans knew Roman history well and hence knew what this could portend.[195]

In 1778 Rush reported to Adams that "General Gates' success has rescued this country in a degree from its idolatry of one man. I told him a few days ago that if I thought he

[192]James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 540, 542 n. 6.

[193]For an excellent summary of Rush's quarrel with Washington, see "Appendix I: Rush and Washington," Letters, II, 1197-1208. See also Rush's letters to Patrick Henry, Jan. 12, 1778, Letters, I, 182-183, 183-184 n. 1, 184-185 n. 7; John Marshall, Sept. 5, 1804, Letters, II, 887-889, 889-890 n. 1-6; John Adams, Feb. 12-March 9, 1812, Letters, II, 1119-1124, 1124-1125 n. 1, 1126 n. 21.

[194]"Notes on Continental Congress, &c.," vol. 2, quoted in "Appendix I," Letters, II, 1199.

[195]"Appendix I," Letters, II, 1199.

alone was able to save this country, I should vote for his being banished."[196] His comment to David Ramsay that Washington possessed as much influence in Congress as the British King over Parliament also revealed a fear of Washington's military power. "CONWAY, MIFFLIN, Lee," Rush concluded, "were sacrificed to the excessive influence and popularity of one man."[197]

While Rush--quite in keeping with his Federalism in the 1780's--expressed satisfaction with the prospect of Washington's becoming the first President under the new Constitution,[198] he became increasingly leery of the idolization of the new President fostered, he believed, by unscrupulous politicians.[199] He accepted the

[196]Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 191.

[197]Ramsay, Nov. 5, 1778, Letters, I, 219-220.

[198]See letter to Timothy Pickering, Aug. 30, 1787, Letters, I, 439-440.

[199]"Appendix I," Letters, II, 1206. "The indignation expressed by Rush (as well as by the Adamses, Jefferson, and others) over public tributes to Washington," Butterfield notes, "is seriously misunderstood if thought disrespectful to the first President. It was directed principally at those whom Rush called the 'old tories,' who had draped themselves in the mantle of Washington and were using his name for political purposes" (Ibid.). In 1792 Rush wrote in his journal Adams' belief "that military ambition was doing our country more harm than the funding system, and that ambition had a strong hold of the heart of the President of the United States" ("1792-1813," p. 215, 1792). Of Washington's administration, Rush later wrote that "Our wise men and women look back to the administration of Washington as the golden age of our country, without recollection that the seeds of all the disputes which now divide our citizens, and of the controversy with France, were sown in it. I say the controversy with France, for this began in the consequence of the offense given to her

Jeffersonian dogma that some Federalists were secretly conspiring for a military dictatorship that would curb popular freedom and replace the Constitution with one patterned after the English monarchy.[200] "Among the national sins of our country," Rush wrote Adams in 1812, is "the idolatrous worship paid to the name of General Washington, by all classes and nearly all parties of our citizens, manifested in the impious application of names and epithets to him which are ascribed in Scripture only to God and to Jesus Christ."[201]

If Washington represented to Rush the potential threat of military despotism, Napoleon Bonaparte symbolized its actuality. In 1808 Rush asked Adams whether Napoleon, "the destroyer of nations," was

> to extend his conquest and tyranny by shedding fresh rivers of human blood? I tremble at his name. The levity of a Frenchman, the phlegm of

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by the British treaty. But not only the seeds of political disputes but of our vices were sown during the same administration, by the funding system and the passion for banks which was created by the profits of script and of the immense interest of the Bank of the United States" (Adams, June 27, 1812, Letters, II, 1145).

[200]"Introduction," The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Representative Selections, ed. Edward Dumbauld (New York, 1955), p. xix. See John Sharp Williams, Thomas Jefferson: His Permanent Influence on American Institutions (New York, 1913), pp. 152ff.

[201]Adams, July 8, 1812, Letters, II, 1146-1147. "We have not instituted divine honors to certain virtues in imitation of the inhabitants of Paris, but we ascribe all the attributes of the Deity to the name of General Washington" (William Marshall, Sept. 15, 1798, Letters, II, 807).

> a German, the avarice of a Dutchman, the cold-heartedness of a Russian, the solidity of an Englishman, the gravity of a Spaniard, the subtlety of an Italian, and the cruelty of a Turk appear to be united in his character. In no one part of his conduct do we trace the least semblance of any one of the virtues that rescued the name of Alexander and Caesar from total infamy. He is devoid of the occasional magnanimity of the former and the habitual clemency of the latter.[202]

Rush could only hope that God would deliver the human race from "the fangs of this beast of prey."[203]

When Rush suggested to Adams that his new remedy for madness, the tranquilizing chair, "could be applied for the relief of Napoleon,"[204] he once again connected individual and social maladjustment, natural history and politics, in order to justify his anti-militarism in scientific terms. Just as monarchy and democracy, "diseased" forms that destroyed the ends of government, influenced the mental and physical health of society, so military dictatorships of mad men represented an unhealthy, neurotic approach to political happiness. Thus Rush opposed military shows, honors, and titles because they fostered "that passion for war, which education, added to human depravity, have made universal," and because they adversely "fascinate the minds of young men." Military reviews enhanced battle by

[202]Adams, Aug. 24, 1808, Letters, II, 974.

[203]Ibid. Napoleon and George III, Rush told Adams, he considered as "scourges of the human race . . ."(Adams, July 4, 1810, Letters, II, 1054).

[204]Adams, Oct. 8, 1810, Letters, II, 1070-1071.

erroneously associating it with "the charms of order"; ". . . Military titles," Rush asserted, "feed vanity, and keep up ideas in the mind which lessen a sense of the folly and miseries of war."[205] Since military heroism prepared the way for military ambition and power, Rush demanded that "the military character be stripped of its glare and even rendered unpopular."[206]

Mental and physical illness, Rush believed, accompanied general social and political disorder. Military despotism was not a rational ordered state; it was a disordered, irrational state composed of citizens infected with "the military mania":

> Young men are most afflicted with this madness; but we now and then meet with it in an old soldier, as in uncle Toby, in Tristram Shandy. It is impossible to understand a conversation with these gentlemen without the help of a military dictionary.--Counterscarps, morasses, fosses, glacis, ramparts, redoubts, abbatis, &c. form the beginning, middle, and end of every sentence. They remember nothing in history, but the detail of sieges and battles, and they consider men as made only to carry muskets. The adventurers in the holy wars, before the Reformation, were all infected with this species of military madness.[207]

The psychological effect of a militaristic state, then, was "to consider man as created not to cultivate the earth or to be happy in any of the pursuits of civilized life, but

[205]"Peace-Office," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 20-21.

[206]James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 540.

[207]"On Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, pp. 214-215.

to carry a musket, to wear a regimental coat, and to kill or be killed."[208] Since individual well-being was not the goal of such a state, Rush rejected it.

In summary, like monarchy and democracy, military dictatorship, Rush believed, failed to provide for the healthy, ordered state necessary to political happiness. Civil power must dominate military power if government is to remain free. As long as peacetime militia laws existed, military displays excited the people's passions, and the nation blindly worshiped its military heroes, America could not escape the shadow of military despotism.

[208]Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 540.

V. The Foundations of Rush's Theory of Republican Government

"The perfection of government," Rush wrote Adams in 1779, "consists in providing restraints against the tyranny of rulers on the one hand and the licentiousness of the people on the other."[209] Rush was convinced that a republican form of government--unlike monarchy, democracy, or military despotism--fully attained governmental perfection because it restrained man's inherent depravity which, if unchecked, inevitably resulted in some form of tyranny--by the one, the few, or the many. "I still continue," he told Jefferson, ". . . to admire and prefer it to all others as most consistent with the rational nature and the moral and religious obligations of man."[210] It also approached scientific perfection because its structure, complex yet harmonious, approximated that of the heavens, and because it promoted the mental and physical health of the species. Free elections under republicanism, Rush believed, "shake the public mind, improve the understanding, from influence of Passions on the understanding, promote longevity."[211] Thus the republican system best achieved the desired purpose

[209]Adams, Oct. 12, 1779, Letters, I, 240.

[210]Jefferson, Mar. 12, 1803, Letters, II, 859; ". . . republican governments are most conformable to reason" and "to revelation likewise" (Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1792, Letters, I, 620).

[211]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 199, June 10, 1791.

of government: it promoted the physical, mental, and moral well-being of its citizens.

Above all, republicanism seemed most compatible with Rush's experimental temperament, his mechanistic approach to government, and his efforts to develop a science of politics. Believing that the republican form of government had never received a fair trial, he argued that the political scientist, just as the scientist preserves perishable matter through chemical treatment, could "combine power in such a way as not only to encrease the happiness, but to promote the duration of republican forms of government. . . ."[212] "I consider it is possible," Rush continued, aligning republicanism with the mechanical perfection of the universe, "to convert men into republican machines. This must be done, if we expect them to perform their parts properly, in the great machine of the government of the state."[213]

But Rush did not rest his scientific argument for republicanism solely on the contention that it was a reasonable imitation of the Newtonian cosmos. Exploring the

[212]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 91. A republic, he wrote Jefferson, was "a government of more energy than a monarchy" (Jefferson, Mar. 12, 1801, Letters, II, 831-832). On the lack of a fair trial for republicanism, see John Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 516; John Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522; Belknap, June 6, 1791, Letters, I, 583; Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 826-827.

[213]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92.

relationship between natural history and political institutions, Rush developed the theory that within a republican political environment, the human species flourished: disease lessened, health improved, longevity increased. He explained to Adams,

> One thing . . . my profession has taught me, viz., that political passions produce fewer diseases in a republic than in a monarchy. Disappointed ambition in Sweden and in Italy has produced sudden death from colics and apoplexies. In America, it has scarcely of late years produced a single hypochondriac disorder. In time I believe the effects of the political passions upon health and life will be still less perceptible in our country.[214]

In his Lectures on Animal Life, he analyzed the healthful effects of republicanism:

> In no part of the human species, is animal life in a more perfect state than in the inhabitants of Great Britain, and the United States of America. With all the natural stimuli that have been mentioned, they are constantly under the invigorating influence of liberty. There is an indissoluble union between moral, political and physical happiness; and if it be true, that elective and representative governments are most favourable to individual, as well as national prosperity, it follows of course, that they are most favourable to animal life. But this opinion does not rest upon an induction derived from the relation, which truths upon all subjects bear to each other. Many facts prove, animal life to exist in a larger quantity and for a longer time, in the enlightened and happy state of Connecticut, in which republican liberty has existed above one hundred and fifty years, than in any other country upon

[214]Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 517. See Rush's observations on this subject in The Diseases of the Mind (Philadelphia, 1812), pp. 68-69.

the surface of the globe.[215]

If the best political and social climate produced long life and health in the people, if the good society were a healthy society, what better argument for republicanism than that it promoted the welfare of animal life? Republican governments, Rush stressed, "appreciate human life, and increase public and private obligations to preserve it."[216] The American "experiment," he believed, held forth the hope of a vigorous, flourishing human species under an invigorating social and political environment.[217]

[215]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 167-168; Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 184-185.

[216]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 52. Confident that the new Federal Constitution fully realized his theory of republican government, he stressed that it would be of incalculable benefit to the life-promoting stimuli of the human mind: "The dimensions of the human mind are apt to be regulated by the extent and objects of the government under which it is formed. Think, then, . . . of the expansion and dignity the American mind will acquire by having its powers transferred from the contracted objects of a state to the more unbounded objects of a national government!--A citizen and a legislator of the free and united states of America will be one of the first characters in the world" (David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454-455).

[217]Rush's description of the federal procession in Philadelphia honoring the new Constitution, and of its effects on those who viewed it, almost seemed to preview the healthful prospects he envisioned for the new government: "Perhaps a greater number or a greater combination of passions never seized at the same time upon every faculty of the soul. The patriot enjoyed a complete triumph, whether the objects of his patriotism were the security of liberty, the establishment of law, the protection of manufactures, or the extension of science in his country. The benevolent man saw a precedent established for forming free governments in every part of the world. The man of humanity contemplated the end of the distresses of his fellow citizens in the revival of commerce and agriculture. Even the selfish passions were not idle. The ambitious man beheld with pleasure the honors that were

Moral arguments, Rush believed, also tended to prove the superiority of republican governments. Devoted to the moral well-being of the individual, Rush was convinced that republican governments contributed to moral happiness and curbed natural evil in their citizens. Rush maintained that a well-balanced republic naturally produced this desired tranquillity and order, when he informed prospective immigrants that

> It is agreeable to observe the influence which our republican governments have already had upon the tempers and manners of our citizens. Amusement is everywhere giving way to business, and local politeness is yielding to universal civility. We differ about forms and modes in politics, but this difference begins to submit to the restraints of moral and social obligation.[218]

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to be disposed of by the new government, and the man of wealth realized once more the safety of his bonds and rents against the inroads of paper money and tender laws. Every person felt one of these passions, many more than one, and some all of them during the procession. No wonder then that it gave so much and such delicate pleasure. But this was not all. The emblems afforded food for the understanding likewise. The history of the most important events of the war, and the inscriptions and devices upon many of the flags, gave occasional employment for that noble power of the mind and added much to the pleasure of the sight. Even the senses partook of the entertainment, for the variety of colors displayed in the various ornaments of the machines and flags and in the dresses of the citizens, together with an excellent band of music, at once charmed the eyes and ears of the spectators and thereby introduced the body to partake, in a certain degree, of the feast of the mind." Moreover, the procession invigorated the body. The parade lasted five hours and covered three miles, "yet scarcely a person complained of fatigue, although there were many old and weakly people in the procession." (Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, Letters, I, 471-472).

[218]"Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 557.

In large part, it was the structural emphasis on balances and checks and the division of powers in republicanism that controlled individual and collective depravity.

To prove that a republic encouraged public morality, Rush observed to Jefferson that the national election of 1800 was an admirable demonstration of the truth "that national stability of opinion and conduct with respect to public men, as well as national integrity and humanity, are more common virtues in a republic than in royal governments." Stability was demonstrated by the fact the state governors had never been voted out of office since 1775; integrity by the citizens' "general fidelity" in paying import duties throughout the union; humanity and integrity by the conduct and honesty of the late election. The positive influence of republicanism on morality was obvious, Rush suggested, when he compared the American government with the monarchies of Europe:

> In the United States every citizen feels the injury committed by public fraud as done to himself. In a monarchy the mischief of fraud is said to extend only to the king, who in the common sense of his subjects is considered to possess millions of property not his own, and of course that it is not criminal to rob him.[219]

In 1803 Rush reiterated to Jefferson the reciprocal relation between the right kind of government and morality; he continued to prefer republicanism because it was most compatible

[219]Jefferson, Mar. 12, 1801, Letters, II, 832.

with "the moral and religious obligations of man."[220]

According to Rush, the significant influence of republicanism on religion demonstrated that it was superior to other forms of government. For one thing it encouraged toleration and the separation of church and state; "our republican form of government," he noted, "has already softened the religious passions. We have less bigotry than formerly; and while there is no court nor monarch, no mode of worship will be preferred from interested considerations."[221] He agreed with Jefferson in his "wishes to keep religion and government independent of each other."[222] Moreover, Rush felt that "Republican forms of government are more calculated to promote Christianity than monarchies. The precepts of the Gospel and the maxims of republics in many instances agree with each other."[223] At times Rush saw republicanism as a prelude to an earthly millennium:

> Republican forms of government are the best repositories of the Gospel: I therefore suppose they are intended as preludes to a

[220]Jefferson, Mar. 12, 1803, Letters, II, 859.

[221]Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 517.

[222]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 824. For Rush's views on this principle see Ibid., II, 824-825. He observed in 1790 that republicanism held forth "the equal share of power . . . to men of every religious sect," adding that "as the first fruits of this perfection in our government, we already see three gentlemen of the Roman Catholic Church members of the legislature of the United States" ("Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 556).

[223]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

> glorious manifestation of its power and influence upon the hearts of men. The language of these free and equal governments seems to be like that of John the Baptist of old, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord--make his paths strait." The benevolent spirit which has lately appeared in the world, in its governments, in its numerous philanthropic and humane societies, and even in public entertainments, reminds me of the first effort of a child to move its body or limbs. These efforts are strong but irregular, and often in a contrary direction to that which is intended. Time and a few unsuccessful experiments will soon bring these motions into a proper direction. The same will happen, I have no doubt, to the present kind but irregular and convulsive impulses of the human heart. At present they lead men to admire and celebrate human lights and human deliverers, . . . but ere long, public admiration and praise will rise to him who is the true light of the world and who only delivers from evils of every kind. At present we wish "liberty to the whole world." But the next touch of the celestial magnet upon the human heart will direct it into wishes for the salvation of all mankind.[224]

Superior to other governmental systems on scientific, moral, and religious grounds, a republic might have appeared invulnerable to Rush, but such was not the case. Four essentials were needed, he felt, to immunize the republican body from political disease: the absence of any monarchic adulteration in republicanism; the need of Christianity as the foundation of republicanism; the establishment of free public education to perpetuate republican principles; and the necessity of maintaining an agricultural economy in a republic.

Rush realized it would take "generations and even ages

[224]Elhanan Winchester, Nov. 12, 1791, Letters, I, 611-612. The ellipsis dots are in Rush's text.

to wear" the remnants of monarchy away.[225] "The republican soil is broke [sic] up," he wrote in 1776, "but we have still many monarchical and aristocratic weeds to pluck up from it."[226] The success of republicanism depended upon the successful elimination of traces of monarchy in America. Rush's letters frequently attributed political, social, economic, and religious difficulties in the new country to the lingering influence of British monarchy.[227] Though he maintained that compound forms of government were necessary to execute its simple ends,[228] he did not mean by "compound" the concept of mixed government John Adams emphasized. To Rush, mixed forms--as exemplified in the English Constitution--meant "a medley, a contradiction, a neutral mixture, opposite principles."[229] Such a government, he explained to Adams, was a greater evil than absolute monarchy:

> Licentiousness, factions, seditions, and rebellions have not been restrained by monarchy even in Great Britain. They have been more numerous

[225]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 198.

[226]Walter Jones, July 30, 1776, Letters, I, 108. "We have knocked up the substance of royalty, but now and then we worship the shadow" (Ibid.). See Rush's letter to Gates, Sept. 5, 1781, Letters, I, 265.

[227]See Jefferson, Mar. 1, 1796, Letters, II, 771-772; James Currie, July 26, 1796, Letters, II, 779; Jefferson, Jan. 4, 1797, Letters, II, 784-785; Adams, May 5, 1809, Letters, II, 1004-1005.

[228]"Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," Selected Writings, p. 78.

[229]"1789-1791," p. 198.

> in that country than in any of the less free monarchies or more free republics of Europe. . . . When we reject a republic, I wish we may adopt an absolute monarchy, for governments . . . should know no medium between absolute republicanism and absolute monarchy. There cannot be a greater absurdity than to connect together in one government the living principle of liberty in the people with the deadly principle of tyranny in an hereditary monarch. They must in time, with the best balance in the world, overset each other. They are created with the implements of war in their hands. Fighting will be natural and necessary to each of them to preserve an existence.[230]

A strong religious and moral foundation was the second important ingredient for achieving a full measure of well-being in a republic. Virtue, thought Rush, was the critical difference between republican and despotic governments. "Public and private integrity," he observed in 1778, "are the only basis on which a republican government can be erected or maintained."[231] Without virtue or integrity, however, republics advanced "fast towards the depravity of manners of a European country."[232] Motivated by the belief that "the more a people are corrupted, the more readily they submit to arbitrary government," Rush concluded that maintaining a solid moral foundation for government was "of the

[230]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

[231]Daniel Roderdeau, Mar. 9-19, 1778, Letters, I, 206; Rush wrote Adams that "Nothing but integrity in private and justice in public bodies can preserve a republic" (Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 191). "Virtue, virtue alone," he told William Gordon, ". . . is the basis of a Republic" (Gordon, Dec. 10, 1778, Letters, I, 221).

[232]Ibid.

utmost importance to the present and future happiness" of the citizens of a republic.[233]

He based his essay on morals, addressed "To the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations," on the necessary connection between morality and good government:

> Under the great diversity of opinions you entertain in religion, you are all united in inculcating the necessity of morals. In this business you are neither Catholics nor Protestants--churchmen nor dissenters. One spirit actuates you all. From the success or failure of your exertions in the cause of virtue, we anticipate the freedom or slavery of our country. Even the new government of the United States, from which so many advantages are expected, will neither restore order nor establish justice among us unless it be accompanied and supported by morality among all classes of people.[234]

When Rush urged Adams in 1811 to address the nation on "those great national social, domestic, and religious virtues which alone can make a people free, great, and happy," he once again emphasized that they were "indispensibly necessary to the existence of a REPUBLIC, and that the vices that are opposed to them necessarily lead to anarchy, monarchy, and despotism."[235]

Struck by the similarity between republican and Christian principles, Rush constantly stressed that Christianity formed the bedrock of republican governments. The

[233]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 461, 463.

[234]Ibid., pp. 461-462.

[235]Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1095, 1096-1097.

Bible, he observed, favored human equality, respect for justice, and "all those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism."[236] A republican philosophy of government, then, was actually "a part of the truth of Christianity":

> A belief in God's universal love to all his creatures, and that he will finally restore all those of them that are miserable to happiness, is a polar truth. It leads to truths upon all subjects, more especially upon the subject of government. . . . Republicanism is a part of the truth of Christianity. It derives power from its true source. It teaches us to view our rulers in their true light. It abolishes the false glare which surrounds kingly government, and tends to promote the true happiness of all its members as well as of the whole world, for peace with everybody is the true interest of all republics.[237]

Inculcating young people with Christian principles, therefore, was "the only means of establishing and perpetuating our republican forms of government."[238]

Arguing for religious education in his essay, "Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," Rush emphasized that "A Christian cannot fail of being a republican" because the precepts of both were essentially alike. He noted, first of all, that the doctrines of Christianity and republicanism coincided in promoting "the happiness of society, and the safety and well being of civil government."

[236]"The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 130.

[237]Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, Letters, I, 584.

[238]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 130.

Secondly, Old Testament teachings of man's creation and of the relation of each man to the other by birth refuted the divine right of kings and strongly argued for "the original and natural equality of all mankind." Thirdly, ". . . every precept of the Gospel," Rush continued, "inculcates those degrees of humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness, which are directly opposed to the pride of monarchy and the pageantry of a court." Fourth, because a Christian's religion taught him that no man "liveth to himself," he could not fail "of being useful to the republic." Rush's final illustration was that both the Christian and the republican lived inoffensively by the golden rule.[239] To a considerable extent, then, Rush believed that republicanism depended on Christianity to prevent political tyranny--as he put it to Jefferson:

> I have always considered Christianity as the strong ground of republicanism. The spirit is opposed, not only to the splendor, but even to the very forms of monarchy, and many of its precepts have for their objects republican liberty and equality as well as simplicity, integrity, and economy in government. It is only necessary for republicanism to ally itself to the Christian religion to overturn all the corrupted political and religious institutions in the world.[240]

The third requirement for a stable, enduring republican government was the establishment of free, tax-supported education. "Most of the distresses of our country, and of

[239]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, pp. 88-89.

[240]Jefferson, Aug. 22, 1800, Letters, II, 820-821.

the mistakes which Europeans have formed of us," Rush wrote Dr. Richard Price of London,

> have arisen from a belief that the American Revolution is over. This is so far from being the case that we have only finished the first act of the great drama. We have changed our forms of government, but it remains yet to effect a revolution in our principles, opinions, and manners so as to accommodate them to the forms of government we have adopted. This is the most difficult part of the business of the patriots and legislators of our country. It requires more wisdom and fortitude than to expel or to reduce armies into captivity. I wish to see this idea inculcated by your pen. Call upon the rulers of our country to lay the foundations of their empire in knowledge as well as virtue.[241]

Believing that the kind of educational system established in America would largely determine the eventual success of the republican experiment, he warned that "wherever learning is confined to one society [religious sect], or to a few men, the government of that country will always be an ARISTOCRACY, whether the prevailing party be composed of rich or poor."[242] "Freedom can exist only in the society of knowledge," Rush stressed. "Without learning, men are incapable of knowing their rights, and where learning is confined to a few people, liberty can be neither equal nor universal." If limited education held ominous implications for republicanism, universal education promised to encourage

[241]Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388.

[242]"To the Citizens of Pennsylvania," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 368 n. 2.

liberty and to promote "just ideas of laws and government."[243] "It is by diffusing learning," he declared, "that we shall destroy aristocratic juntas of all parties, and establish a true commonwealth."[244]

Education performed two important functions in a republic, Rush felt, by preparing citizens for republicanism and by training political leaders. Universal free education, he believed, accommodated the people's "principles, opinions, and manners" to republican forms of government.[245] Would it not, Rush asked Adams, "be better to raise our people to a pure and free government by good education than to sink to their present vulgar habits by accommodating a government to them?"[246] In Pennsylvania, for example, where so many distinct nationalities existed, the dissemination of knowledge would render citizens more homogeneous and thus more fitted to government.[247]

Unless an education adapted to republicanism inspired the people with "federal principles" and removed their

[243]"Education Agreeable to a Republican Form of Government," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 97.

[244]"To the Citizens of Pennsylvania," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 368 n. 2.

[245]Richard Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388. See also "On the Defects of the Confederation," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 29; "To the Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 491.

[246]Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 517.

[247]"Mode of Education," 1798," Selected Writings, p. 88. See also "To Trustees of Dickinson College," May 23, 1785, Letters, I, 353; Annie Boudinot Stockton, June 19, 1787, Letters, I, 421-422.

ignorance and prejudice, Rush warned in 1788, the enemies of the Constitution would prevail in their charge that the government was "too extensive for a republic" and that it was "contrary to the habits of the people." An enlightened electorate--which only education provided--was necessary, therefore, to put "the Constitution and happiness of the United States upon a permanent foundation."[248]

Not only did education prepare citizens to participate intelligently in government, but it also trained governmental officers; it made men, Rush said, "better rulers as well as better citizens in a republican government."[249] Whenever rulers were educated, laws were wise and stable, constitutions perfect, and governments free.[250] Rush's proposed federal university was partly motivated by his contention that all governmental officers needed special education in the "principles and forms of government, applied in a particular manner to the explanation of every part of the

[248]"To the Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 491, 495. See also John Coakley Lettsom, April 8, 1785, Letters, I, 350; Richard Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 386. As for female education, in addition to the usual curriculum, Rush would have them taught the principles of liberty and government as well as the duties of patriotism ("Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 95). See also Rush, Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1798), p. 75, quoted in Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), p. 168.

[249]John King, April 2, 1783, Letters, I, 298.

[250]"To the Citizens of Pennsylvania," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 367.

Constitution and laws of the United States."[251] In fact, Rush suggested that after a certain time all public officials, elected or appointed, should be graduates of this federal university; thus political office would be "confined to persons who had imbibed federal and republican ideas. . . ."[252] Such education for political leaders, Rush concluded, was "very necessary in our republic."[253] What was needed, then, to maintain a healthy republic was the diffusion of knowledge to all citizens--because of its salutary effect upon religion, liberty, just government, republican manners, agriculture, and manufactures.[254]

[251]"To Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 492. Rush also stressed history, practical legislation, law, economics, natural philosophy, natural history, philology, and modern languages as essential parts of the curriculum of a federal university ("On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 29; "To the Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 492-493; Richard Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388).

[252]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 29; "To the Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 494. Butterfield notes that possibly because Rush later realized this idea "had dangerous consequences in view of the development of parties," he did not include the proposal in his Essays (Ibid., I, 495 n. 1).

[253]Charles Nisbet, April 19, 1784, Letters, I, 323.

[254]"Education Agreeable," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 97-98. For full details of Rush's proposals for free, public supported education along sectarian lines, see A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; To Which Are Added Thoughts upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic (Phila.: Dobson, 1786). Both parts of this tract were reprinted separately under the titles "Education Agreeable to a Republican Form of Government" and "Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic" in his Essays, 1798 (Letters, I, 387 n. 3. Both are reprinted in Selected Writings, pp. 87-96; 97-100). For his plan of a federal university, see "To Friends of the Federal Government: A Plan for a Federal

An agricultural economy was the fourth essential need for a successful republic. When Rush called agriculture "the true basis of national health, riches and populousness,"[255] he hinted of the reciprocal relationship between agrarianism, republicanism, and social well-being. As he explained,

> Civil society and agriculture began together. The latter has always been looked upon among the first employments of mankind.--It calls forth every individual of the human race into action.--It employs the body in a manner the most conducive to its health.--It preserves and increases the species most;--and lastly, it is most friendly to the practice of virtue. For these reasons, therefore, it is natural to conclude that it is most agreeable to the Supreme Being that man should be supported by it.[256]

"In a word, where agriculture is encouraged, there will be riches, where there are riches, there will be Power, and where there is Power, there will be Freedom and Independence."[257]

University," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 491-495 (reprinted in Selected Writings, pp. 101-105); "On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 29; Richard Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388-389. Though education was vital to a republic's survival, Rush emphasized that it must be nonpartisan (John Montgomery, June 21, 1799, Letters, II, 812). For a qualified view on the importance of learning in a republic, see Rush's letter to James Hamilton, June 27, 1810, Letters, II, 1053. Harry G. Good, Benjamin Rush and His Services to American Education (Berne, Ind., 1918), considers Rush's educational views in detail.

[255]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 290. Agriculture was "the great basis of national wealth and happiness" ("Education Agreeable," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 97).

[256]"Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, pp. 358-359.

[257]"On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, p. 392. "Agriculture is the only valid basis of the riches of any country. In Rome when that empire flourished, we find agriculture was held in the highest estimation" (Ibid.).

According to Rush, then, the advantages of health, longevity, and population growth and the blessings of commerce, literature, science, religion, and government "can only be secured to our country by AGRICULTURE." He cited Pennsylvania as an example of the positive influence of agriculture upon "the number and happiness of a people." The province had grown in population so rapidly and had been so productive in literature, education, and science that only a divine prescience could have predicted it.[258] Provided that the nation as a whole maintained its agrarian foundation, its future greatness seemed assured:

> It is impossible to tell from history, what will be the effects of agriculture, industry, temperance, and commerce, urged on by the competition of colonies, united in the same general pursuits, in a country, which for extent, variety of soil, climate, and number of navigable rivers, has never been equalled in any quarter of the globe. America is the theatre where human nature will probably receive her last and principal literary, moral and political honors.[259]

In contrast, Rush viewed manufacturing, which inevitably concentrated population into large cities, as an environment inimical to republicanism. Like other agrarians, he instinctively associated vice and corruption with cities--as he wrote Jefferson, "I agree with you in your opinion of cities. Cowper the poet very happily expresses our ideas of them compared with the country. 'God made the

[258]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 290-291.

[259]Ibid., p. 290.

country--man made cities.' I consider them in the same light that I do abscesses on the human body, viz., as reservoirs of all the impurities of a community."[260] Because Rush associated monarchy with the urban environment, he urged in 1783 that Congress establish the capitol in a village like Princeton where it would be free from "the combustible matter of vice" found in large cities.[261] Later, on the theory that "The government will receive a tone and complexion from the circumambient air in which it is placed," he encouraged John Adams to use his influence to prevent New York--composed of one third "British-hearted citizens"--from becoming the seat of the United States Congress.[262] From these English sympathizers, Rush explained, members of Congress

> will learn to be very complaisant to all the vices of monarchy and to the corrupt manners of the city of London. . . . Mr. Coxe informs me that a lady a few weeks ago in a large company inquired, "What news from our poor king?" Can the virtue of our Congress be safe in a city where such speeches are both common and popular? Think, sir, of the influence of light tea-parties, music parties, &c., &c., upon the manners of the rulers of a great republic. Should amusement or improvement be the great object of company-keeping? And are those men the most suitable companions for members of

[260] Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 824. Jefferson had written to Rush, Sept. 23, 1800, that the growth of cities was "pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man" (Ibid., II, 827 n. 1). See also letters to Enoch Green, 1761, Letters, I, 4; "To the Citizens of Pennsylvania," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 367.

[261] John Montgomery, June 27, 1783, Letters, I, 302.

[262] Adams, Mar. 19, 1789, Letters, I, 506.

> Congress who have showed less zeal to establish the government from which they derive their authority than to detain them in the city of New York? By no means. They will act like children if they suffer themselves to be seduced by the gingerbread, nuts, and baby house which they have spread before them.[263]

Rush placed much of his hope for a stable republic, therefore, on the enlightened farmer-scholar of an agrarian society. Similar to Jefferson's natural aristocracy of talent and virtue, Rush's farmer-scholar, educated in republican principles, formed the basic citizenry of a republic and provided its most dependable source of leadership.[264] Utilizing the physiocratic concept of the morality of an agrarian environment, Rush reasoned that "our rulers must be taken . . . from the cultivators of the earth" because "their manner of life secures them best from that corruption to which all governors are naturally disposed."[265]

[263] Ibid., I, 506-507.

[264] "To the Citizens of Pennsylvania," Aug. 31, 1785, Letters, I, 366-367.

[265] Ibid., I, 367. "The country life is happy, chiefly because its laborious employments are favourable to virtue, and unfriendly to vice" ("The Influence of Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 196). Jefferson, in Notes on Virginia, observed that "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example" (Writings, ed. H. A. Washington, Washington, 1853-1854, III, 268-269; quoted in Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, New York, 1930, I, 347).

Convinced, then, of the superiority of republican forms of government on scientific, ethical, and theological grounds unless adulterated by monarchy, religious infidelity, inadequate education, or manufacturing, Rush concluded that a republic was "not only rational but practicable."[266] In a letter to the Earl of Buchan in 1795, Rush reviewed the arguments that supported his belief that republics best achieved the ends of good government: "The United States continue to demonstrate by their internal order and external prosperity the practicality, safety, and happiness of republican forms of government and among a people too educated for monarchical principles and habits."[267]

Where virtue and knowledge were wanting, Rush knew, republics were built upon quicksand: "Every man, who attempts to introduce a republican form of government, where the people are not prepared for it by virtue and knowledge, is as much a madman as St. Anthony was, when he preached the Gospel to fishes."[268] In view of Rush's frequent charges, in his last years, that corruption and ignorance pervaded America, he was just such a madman, for he continued his "belief in republican systems of political

[266]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 826-827.

[267]The Earl of Buchan, June 25, 1795, Letters, II, 761. "The United States continue," Rush wrote Griffith Evans, "to exhibit proofs to the world that republics are practical governments. We are still peaceable and happy. . . ." (Evans, Mar. 4, 1796, Letters, II, 772).

[268]"On Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 214.

happiness."[269] ". . . I will not admit," a far from naive Rush declared to Jefferson in 1800,

> that we have been deceived in our early and long affection for republican forms of government. . . . As well might we reject the pure and simple doctrines and precepts of Christianity because they have been dishonored by being mixed with human follies and crimes by the corrupted churches of Europe, as renounce our republics because their name has been dishonored by the follies and crimes of the French nation. The preference which men depraved by false government have given to monarchy is no more a proof of its excellence than the preference which men whose appetites have been depraved by drinking whiskey is a proof that it is more wholesome than water. . . . Representative and elective government appears to be a discovery of modern times. It has met with the fate of many other discoveries which have had for their objects the melioration of the condition of man. It has been opposed, traduced, and nearly scouted from the face of the earth.[270]

In analyzing Rush's political thought in the previous sections of this chapter, we first noted that certain basic assumptions about human nature and science permeated and supported his speculations. Then we examined his theory of constitutional government, based on the complex execution of simple principles, and his criticism of despotic forms of government because they failed to provide for the general welfare. Next we considered the scientific, moral, and religious reasons republican governments successfully embodied his general theory of free government. Finally,

[269]Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 516.

[270]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 826-827.

we discussed the critical elements necessary for republics to flourish. What we have attempted to demonstrate throughout this portion of the study is that Rush constantly drew upon natural history, natural philosophy, and theology to guide his thinking and to evaluate his conclusions. We shall now consider his analysis of the nature of republicanism--its emphasis on balances and checks, its division of powers, its federalistic point of view, its mechanics of suffrage and representation. In the following sections, we shall continue to point out where Rush's attitude toward human nature and faith in science and natural history influenced his republican philosophy of government.

VI. Rush's Theory of Republican Government

A republic, Rush wrote Adams in 1789, was "a government consisting of three branches, and each derived at different times and for different periods from the PEOPLE. Where this circulation is wanting between rulers and the ruled, there will be an obstruction to genuine government. A king or a senate not chosen by the people at certain periods becomes . . . an abscess in the body politic which must sooner or later destroy the healthiest state."[271] Rush's definition suggested the characteristics of republicanism he stressed frequently in his essays and letters. First of all, Rush emphasized the separation of powers into independent legislative, judicial, and executive branches, each counterpoised against the other--an obvious use of Newtonian physics to control the factious, predatory nature of man. Second, political sovereignty, he stressed, lay in the people who, in turn, delegated it to government for temporary periods of time.[272] Third, in contrast to pure democracy, republics relied more heavily on representative government. Fourth, the people chose the officers of the legislative and executive branches at frequent intervals, thus establishing a rotation of power; without this suffrage,

[271] Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

[272] "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 71: "Government supposes and requires a delegation of power."

the mental and physical "health" of the state was vulnerable to "diseased" forms of government.[273] Fifth, the foundation for republicanism, Rush maintained, was "universal and equal liberty," for "no form of government can be rational but that which is derived from the Suffrages of the people who are the subjects of it."[274]

Before considering these aspects of republicanism in detail, we should examine briefly certain general observations Rush made on the nature of a republic. As he made clear when he analyzed monarchy and military despotism, individual power seriously threatened republics. Drawing upon Newtonian physics to make his point, Rush observed, "Monarchies are illuminated by a sun, but republics should be illuminated only by constellations of great men."[275] The final sovereignty, however, lay not even in men, but in laws; the only sovereign Rush acknowledged in a republic was its laws.[276] As a specimen of Joseph Priestley's republican views, Rush quoted approvingly the chemist's observation that "The time will . . . come when laws shall govern so completely that a man shall be a month in America

[273]See Barbeu Dubourg, Sept. 16, 1776, Letters, I, 111.

[274]"A Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 19; "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 46.

[275]David Ramsay, Nov. 5, 1778, Letters, I, 220.

[276]Horatio Gates, June 12, 1781, Letters, I, 264.

without knowing who is President of the United States."[277]

Although critics accused republican governments of "leading to disorder and licentiousness," such charges, Rush felt, not only were unjustified but actually tended to characterize monarchy.[278] There had been fewer, and less violent, factions in America since 1776 than in many monarchies under less distressing conditions during the same period. Instead of war and bloodshed, factions in America produced nothing more than scurrility in newspapers and angry speeches. Moreover, passions resulting from republican politics produced fewer diseases than those resulting from monarchy.[279] Republics, he commented to Richard Price of London, traveled to "order and wise government" with less violence than monarchies--through "a sea of blunders" rather than through "seas of blood."[280] Thus the principle of equal representation in republics reduced factions and maintained order.[281]

In addition to stability, the encouragement of equality was another important characteristic of republican governments. During the procession in Philadelphia honoring the new federal government in 1788, Rush observed that it demonstrated the inherent economic equality of republican

[278]Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, Letters, I, 583.

[279]Adams, June 15, 1789, Letters, I, 516-517.

[280]Price, Oct. 27, 1786, Letters, I, 409.

[281]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 198, June 10, 1791.

governments, for in the procession, in contrast to those in monarchic governments, no trade or profession was accorded any rank or distinction.[282] The principles of republican governments, by teaching man "the absurdity of the divine origin of kingly power," not only "approximate the extreme ranks of men to each other," but also "revive and establish the relations of fellow-citizen, friend, and brother."[283]

The concept of balanced powers, attained by dividing governmental power into equal branches, Rush believed, was a fundamental principle in republican governments. His chief criticism of simple democracy was that it created "an unbalanced republic," by failing to separate the judicial, executive, and legislative powers, or by failing to make the three branches independent and equal. Had the new federal government, he wrote Adams in 1789, "been more completely balanced" by providing greater power in the executive branch, "it would have realized all the wishes of the most sanguine friends to republican liberty."[284] Though the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 divided the powers of government, it did not, Rush charged, balance or check them: neither the governor nor the council could exercise

[282]Elias Boudinot, July 7, 1788, Letters, I, 472.

[283]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 52.

[284]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522-523.

a veto to check acts of the legislature; neither the executive nor the judicial powers were independent.[285]

Rush agreed with Adams that "a constitution composed of three branches" was "the only one that can preserve political happiness."[286] "Order and tranquillity," he asserted, "appear to be the natural consequence of a well-balanced republic."[287] A well-balanced and checked republican government, then, was necessary to provide "safety, wisdom, and dignity" in government, and "perfect security" for "property, liberty, and life"[288]; otherwise, a nation could not ward off political diseases, such as monarchy and anarchy.

In particular, Rush saw two advantages inherent in a system of checks and balances. First of all, it prevented faction and rebellion, restrained human folly and madness, and recognized the political effects of human depravity. "The factions, seditions, and rebellions of republics," he pointed out, "arise wholly from the want of checks or balances and from a defect of equal representation."[289] Secondly, checks, especially those inherent in a compound,

[285]Anthony Wayne, Sept. 24, 1776, Letters, I, 115; "Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 69-72.

[286]Adams, Jan. 22, 1789, Letters, I, 498; see David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455.

[287]"Information to Immigrants," Apr. 16, 1790, Letters, I, 557.

[288]Anthony Wayne, Sept. 24, 1776, Letters, I, 115; Wayne, April 2, 1777, Letters, I, 137.

[289]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

i. e., bicameral, legislature, provided one of the "two securities for liberty in any government," he explained to David Ramsay. Without checks,"a volume of rights would avail nothing." So long as liberty was committed to a compound legislature, the sovereignty of the people was secure; so long as the compound legislature and the executive branch were required to concur on legislation, "an hundred principles in man will lead them to watch, to check, and to oppose each other should an attempt be made by either of them upon the liberties of the people."[290]

Political power separated into distinct branches, then, furnished government with a check on tyranny and provided a vital protection of liberty. But a compound, as opposed to a single, legislature provided even greater checks against faction in government. Rush, in contrast to Adams, believed that a bicameral legislature did not protect property interests primarily, but guarded the poor masses from encroachment by the wealthy few. In his attack against the unicameral legislature in Pennsylvania, Rush explained how a compound legislature protected the poor:

> The men of middling property and poor men can never be safe in a mixed representation with the men of over-grown property. Their liberties can only be secured by having exact bounds prescribed to their power, in the fundamental principles of the Constitution. By a representation of the men of middling fortunes in one house, their whole strength is collected against the influence of wealth. Without such a representation, the

[290]Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453-454.

> most violent efforts of individuals to oppose it would be divided and broken, and would want that system, which alone would enable them to check that lust for dominion which is always connected with opulence. The government of Pennsylvania therefore has been called most improperly a government for poor men. It carries in every part of it a poison to their liberties. It is impossible to form a government more suited to the passions and interests of rich men.[291]

Moreover, Rush would check the aristocratic tendencies of the upper house by giving it "no one exclusive privilege" over the lower house (in contrast to the House of Lords in England) and by giving it no power "but what is derived from the annual suffrages of the People." "A body thus chosen," he stressed, "could have no object in view but the happiness of their constituents."[292] The significant feature of a double legislature, Rush concluded, was safety, "in as much as each body possesses a free and independent power, so that they mutually check ambition and usurpation in each other."[293]

[291]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 63. Cp. Adams' position in A Defence of the Constitutions . . . (1787-1789).

[292]Ibid., p. 61. To illustrate his point, Rush noted that it was "remarkable to Connecticut, that the legislative council of the State has in no one instance made amendments, or put a negative upon the acts of their Assembly, in the course of above one hundred years, in which both have not appeared to the people in a few months to have been calculated to promote their liberty and happiness" (Ibid.).

[293]Ibid., p. 68. A constitution, based on republican principles, should include provisions for amendments, in order to give the people an additional check against arbitrary government. "The constant changes in human affairs, and in the dispositions of a people," Rush explained, "might render occasional alterations . . . necessary in the

In discussing the nature of republican governments, Rush frequently commented on the function of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches. The separation of governmental powers into autonomous units that mutually checked one another was to Rush, as we have seen, an important part of the system of balances and checks. No individual or group of men could possess exclusive judicial, executive and legislative power if the people's liberty was to remain inviolate. "Absolute power," he asserted, "should never be trusted to man. It has perverted the wisest heads, and corrupted the best hearts in the world. I should be afraid to commit my property, liberty, and life to a body of angels for one whole year."[294] Rush was particularly fearful of combining the legislative, executive, and judicial powers of a state into a single representative assembly. "This combination of powers in one body," he wrote, "has in all ages been pronounced a tyranny."[295]

The executive branch, Rush believed, functioned primarily as a check upon the legislature through its power of veto. He criticized the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 because neither the president nor the executive council

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most perfect Constitution." Thus he criticized the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 because its complicated amendment procedures prevented the alteration of what he felt to be a tyrannical state government. The legislature, of course, should not possess the power to amend its constitution; only "a representation of the people, chosen for that purpose" should be empowered to change it (Ibid., pp. 54, 73-74, 76-77).

[294] Ibid., p. 57.

[295] Ibid., p. 70.

held a negative upon the laws of the assembly. Without this, the executive had no real authority or influence in the government. In the provincial government before the Revolutionary War, the Governor, even though he served the king's interests, not the people's, frequently checked the "hasty, and ill-digested resolutions" which the assemblymen themselves condemned "in their cooler hours."[296]

For the executive branch to maintain a balance of power with the representative body, it was absolutely necessary that it be wholly independent. Again Rush attacked the Pennsylvania Constitution for failing to keep the executive power independent of the legislature. Two provisions of the constitution, he explained, placed the power of the council into the hands of the assembly. By the first provision, the joint ballot of the council and assembly chose the president, but since the assembly outnumbered the council five to one, it actually selected the chief executive.[297] By the second, the assembly set the salaries of the president and each of the counsellors--a fact which "will necessarily render them dependant [sic] upon them."[298] Rush felt that rotation of power in the executive branch, by the vote of the people, sufficiently prevented aristocratic

[296] Ibid., pp. 65, 69.

[297] However, in Rush's criticism of the Confederation in 1787, he advocated that "the president be chosen annually by the joint ballots of both houses" of a proposed bicameral legislature ("On the Defects of the Confederation," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 27).

[298] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

tendencies; thus it was not necessary that the legislature dominate it.[299] After a certain period in office--perhaps seven, nine, or eleven years--the executive officer would be ineligible to that position.[300]

In two areas, Rush stressed that executive officers should have exclusive power of appointment because they derived their power from all citizens, in contrast to representatives who held office by the suffrage of a small portion, of a state. Concerning the appointment of judges, Rush explained, ". . . if all the magistrates in the State were appointed by the Governor, or executive part of the State, it would be impossible for me to appear before the bar of a magistrate any where who did not derive his power originally from me"; otherwise, "I am bound contrary to the principles of liberty (which consist in a man being governed by men chosen by himself). . . ."[301] Rush also was concerned with the selection of military officers. He recommended that the executive "possess certain powers in conjunction with a privy council, especially the power of appointing officers. . . . The officers will not only be better when appointed this way, but one of the principal causes of faction will be thereby removed from congress."[302] Moreover, if the executive

[299] Ibid., p. 70; Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

[300] Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1155.

[301] "Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 72.

[302] "On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 27.

power of a state appointed all military officers, then a soldier would view them as creatures of his own power, and they, in turn, would treat him fairly because of his influence at elections. If officers held their commissions from people in local sections, however, a soldier in a state militia would frequently be commanded by officers whose power did not derive originally from him.[303] In both of these instances, Rush implied that an executive appointive power would create a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the appointed official as well as the citizens of the government.

Rush, then, was convinced of the need for a strong executive power to match that of the legislature. Even the new Federal Constitution, he felt, did not create a sufficiently powerful executive; had it granted the President more power, it would have "been more completely balanced."[304] Rush summed up his opinions in a letter to Adams in 1812:

> You are mistaken in supposing that I think our executive too strong. I wish it were wholly independent of the Senate in all its appointments. I wish further that the President should be chosen for 7, 9, or 11 years, and afterwards become ineligible to that or any other station or office,

[303]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 72. "Had the appointment of the militia officers been left to the council or to a governor, such men would probably have been put into office as would have drawn with them the flower of the yeomanry of the state into the field" (Anthony Wayne, June 18, 1777, Letters, I, 150).

[304]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

> with a salary of 2 or 3 thousand dollars a year to compensate for that disability and to enable him to support the expenses to which his having filled the office of President would expose him in subsequent life. This would give him an independence as the first magistrate of the nation that would obviate one half the evils of our government.[305]

The legislative branch, like the executive and judicial, derived its power and authority from the people; therefore, members of a representative congress, Rush thought, ought to be considered servants, not masters.[306] Rush was concerned that the representative body neither assume executive and judicial powers, nor dominate the executive and judiciary. Its function should be solely legislative. Among the duties of a representative assembly, he believed, perhaps the exclusive right of taxation was the most important. The legislature retained this right because it represented the greatest part of the people; because its members, gathered from all parts of the country, were thus knowledgeable of the situation of all the commonwealth; and because "they (from their greater number) are naturally supposed to have more property in the state, and therefore have a better right to give it away for purposes of government."[307]

The preservation of the liberties of the people, Rush believed, was also an important function of the legislative

[305]Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1155.

[306]John Dunlop, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 229-230.

[307]Catharine Macaulay, Jan. 18, 1769, Letters, I, 71.

branch of government. A system of representation secured and maintained the rights of the people; ". . . the people," he declared, "where their liberties are committed to an equal representation and to a compound legislature . . . , will always be the sovereigns of the rulers and hold all their rights in their own hands."[308] Although the legislative branch guarded the people's freedom and well-being, Rush knew its proceedings were frequently far from ideal.[309] Economic motives, for example, such as those which led New England in Congress to oppose successfully a high tariff on molasses for rum, furnished Rush "with a melancholy proof that we have nothing to hope from the influence of law in making men wise and sober."[310] Concerning the limitations of legislation, Rush wrote Adams, "It would be well if legislators were taught before they begin to legislate that there are certain things which elude the power of government as certainly as a stone when thrown into the air falls to the ground." "The dictates of conscience, religious and philosophical opinions," and price fixing, for example, were beyond the powers of legislation.[311] Aware of the limitations of lawmaking, Rush asked, how can legislation best protect the individual's rights? By basing it on the Bible, he

[308]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453.

[309]See "Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 56-57.

[310]Jeremy Belknap, July 13, 1789, Letters, I, 520, 521 n. 2.

[311]Adams, April 1, 1809, Letters, II, 1000.

answered, for "In the Bible alone man is described as he is. He can be governed of course only by accommodating law to his nature as developed in that sacred book."[312]

The checking of legislative excesses by executive veto and judicial review--however important to Rush--was to no avail unless the legislature itself was divided into two independent powers that would "mutually check ambition and usurpation in each other." The upper house, composed primarily of men of property, effectively checked the lower popular assembly for two reasons--the legislative council often consisted "of men of superior knowledge and experience in the State," and its members had greater "obligations to wisdom and integrity" because a smaller group was more answerable to the public for improper conduct. This legislative senate, however, possessed "no one exclusive privilege" and no power "but what is derived from the annual suffrages of the People." Its duties included amending and vetoing acts of the assembly. The lower house, or representative assembly, protected "men of middling property and poor men" whose interests "can never be safe in a mixed representation with the man of over-grown property." By representing these men in one house, "their whole strength is collected against the influence of wealth."[313]

[312]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993.

[313]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 61, 63, 64, 68.

For Rush, therefore, the many advantages of a bicameral legislature made it absolutely mandatory for a republican form of government, offering "the utmost freedom" since its decisions "cannot fail of coinciding with the wills of the great majority of the community."[314] Moreover, a compound legislature provided safety because the two independent bodies mutually checked one another. It also provided great wisdom, for every law amended and revised by both houses was "necessarily strained of every mixture of folly, passion, and prejudice." In addition, such a government kept its freedom longer--Rush remarked that Sparta remained free over 500 years because it had a compound legislature. Such a government also established "obedience to laws, subordination to magistrates, civility and decency of behavior, and the contrary of everything like mobs and factions." Finally, bicameral legislatures best encouraged the health of the people in its broadest sense; they were

> most agreeable to human nature, inasmuch as they afford the greatest scope for the expansion of the powers and virtues of the mind. Wisdom, learning, experience, with the most extensive benevolence, the most unshaken firmness, and the utmost elevation of soul, are all called into exercise by the opposite and different duties of the different representations of the people.[315]

In short, a compound legislature--by providing for individual growth, order, durability, wisdom, safety, and freedom--

[314] Ibid., pp. 68, 69, 69 n. 2.

[315] Ibid., p. 69.

best obtained the desired ends set forth in his own theory of free government: it met his tests of science, natural history, theology, and simple-complex government.

But the legislative branch, Rush knew, was also a potential source of tyranny, especially when the legislature dominated the executive and the judiciary and when it was a unicameral representative body. He thus argued for a balance of powers and a bicameral legislature. Convinced that arbitrary government "was natural where all legislative power is lodged in a single body of men," he constantly spoke out against a single legislature in his correspondence and essays.[316] Pennsylvania's single assembly, Rush remarked to Anthony Wayne, was "the only unaccountable body of men that ever existed in a free country."[317] When unlimited in power, "a single legislature," Rush observed, "is big with tyranny." He preferred living under a government of one man than that of many men in a unicameral assembly.[318]

In his essay "On the Defects of the Confederation," he emphasized that one of its chief weaknesses was "vesting the sovereign power of the United States in a single legislature. . . ." Although the Confederation lacked coercive power, to increase it would make the unicameral

[316]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 158.

[317]Wayne, April 2, 1777, Letters, I, 137.

[318]Wayne, May 19, 1777, Letters, I, 148. See Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453.

Congress "more dangerous." Consequently, Rush recommended that the Constitutional Convention divide "the supreme federal power . . . into two distinct independent branches," a council of one delegate and an assembly of two, three, or four delegates, "chosen annually by each state." "I apprehend," he concluded, "this division of power of Congress will become more necessary, as soon as they are invested with more ample powers of levying and expending public money."[319]

Rush's most concentrated attack upon the evils of a unicameral legislature appeared in his detailed analysis of the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. Criticizing the fact that "the supreme, absolute, and uncontrolled power of the whole State is lodged in the hands of one body of men," he attempted to refute the arguments which favored a single legislature.[320] First, the proponents of a single legislatured argued that it was in harmony with the idea that perfection in government consisted in simplicity. Rush responded to this argument by distinguishing between simplicity in the principles of government and complexity in their execution. If ". . . governments are dangerous and tyrannical in proportion as they approach to simplicity," then a government based on a single legislature, in its very simplicity, was despotic. Secondly, the friends of

[319]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, pp. 27-28.

[320]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 60-68.

unicameral legislatures said there was no danger of tyranny since they shared the burdens laid upon their constituents, but Rush noted that history recorded accounts of single assemblies that exempted themselves from such burdens. Moreover, it was possible under the Pennsylvania Constitution for an assembly to be composed completely of non-property owners who could, in a few years, drain the State of its wealth.

To a third argument for single representative bodies--that in bicameral legislatures the upper house often vetoed salutary laws, as was the case in England--Rush answered that when legislative senates, in contrast to the House of Lords, derived their power from the annual suffrage of the people and held no exclusive privileges, they usually acted to promote the people's happiness and freedom. Fourth, advocates of a single legislature noted that the federal Congress under the Articles of Confederation was unicameral. Rush argued, however, that the objects of federal legislation were strictly limited, always liable to checks by each of the Thirteen States, and involved neither the liberty, property, nor life of the individuals of any State. That legislative councils laid the foundation for aristocracy was the fifth argument for single legislatures that Rush considered. He felt this danger unreal, for the people elected the upper house annually and the assembly checked any aristocratic tendencies in its deliberations. Greater danger from aristocracy, Rush believed, existed in single

legislatures where, because of the influence of wealth and the depravity of human nature, the rich often gained absolute control and the poor had no lower house to protect their vital interests.

The sixth argument Rush analyzed was that in single legislatures those of greater wisdom who usually composed the senate, when mixed with assemblymen, instructed and enlightened them. Rush, however, suggested that the assemblymen might reduce wiser heads to their ill passions and prejudices. In addition, even if not harmfully influenced, counsellors were so decidedly in the minority that those who ordinarily composed assemblies constantly outvoted them. Seventh, the proponents of the single legislature pointed out that a council of twenty or thirty members should never dominate an assembly of seventy to eighty. Though believing in a balance of power between chambers, Rush argued that counsellors, probably more experienced and knowledgeable and of greater integrity because, by virtue of their smaller numbers, more answerable to the public, more properly dominated the legislature than assemblymen. Besides, he added, the supporters of the present constitution could not object since the forty-seventh section gave uncontrolled power to a twenty-four member council of censors to revise and censure the activities of the government for the preceding seven years. Rush reasoned that

> two houses consisting of an unequal number of members, both viewing objects through the same medium of time and place, may agree in every thing essential, and disagree in matters only

> of doubtful issue to the welfare of the state; but I am sure, a body of twenty-four men sitting in judgment upon the proceedings of a body of men defunct in their public capacity seven years before them, cannot fail of committing the most egregious mistakes from the obscurity which time, and their ignorance of a thousand facts and reasonings must throw upon all their deliberations.[321]

Rush charged that the eighth argument--that Pennsylvania had always been governed by a single legislature--was "without any foundation." The governor, who possessed a negative as well as the power of amending acts of the assembly, was thus "a distinct branch of our legislature."

Ninth, defenders of the single legislature stressed that the constitution provided four checks on the assembly: annual elections, open legislative sessions, publication of laws for public assent before their passage, and punishment of violations of the constitution by the council of censors. Rush responded to the first check, by observing that future assemblies, possessing great power from the many offices they bestow, might abolish elections or fetter them with restrictions to prevent nine-tenths from voting. Even if elections remained, assemblies could do great harm in a year's time. The second check, Rush noted, was a rather impractical one, for the few who actually attended legislative sessions were hardly representative of the people. The third--the assent of the people at large--was almost impossible to obtain short of county by county balloting, and thus an ineffective check. The final check, the council of censors,

[321] Ibid., pp. 64-65.

was ineffectual because it met only once every seven years. An individual or group might "deceive, rob, and enslave . the public for seven years and then flee the country to escape the punishment of the council.

Thus Rush attempted to refute the current arguments among political thinkers for a single legislature. He was convinced that, above all, such a system was prejudicial to the liberties of the people; it defeated the very purpose of government. Using courts of law as an example, Rush commented that

> In a free government, the most inconsiderable portion of our liberty and property cannot be taken from us, without the judgment of two or three courts; but, by the Constitution of Pennsylvania, the whole of our liberty and and property, and even our lives, may be taken from us, by the hasty and passionate decision of a single Assembly.[322]

In 1789, Rush reviewed his objections to a single legislature:

> My observations upon the misery which a single legislature has produced in Pennsylvania have only served to increase my abhorrence of that species of government. I could as soon embrace the most absurd dogmas in the most absurd of all the pagan religions as prostitute my understanding by approving of our state Constitution. It is below a democracy. It is mobocracy, if you will allow me to coin a word. If you will not, permit me to compare it to a wheelbarrow or a balloon. I never see our self-balanced legislature meet but I feel as if I saw a body of men ascending in one of those air vehicles without sails or helm.[323]

[322] Ibid., p. 68.

[323] Adams, Jan. 22, 1789, Letters, I, 498-499. In his examination of the single assembly in Pennsylvania, Rush

Rush made few observations on the judicial branch, but in general he advocated an independent judiciary that functioned as a check on the bicameral legislature and the executive branch, and guarded the life, liberty, and property of the people. In a republican form of government, the judgment of two or three courts, he believed, were necessary to take from a citizen the least portion of his liberty and property. He supported "the practice of our courts of law in favour of repeated deliberations and divisions." "Innocence," he concluded, "has nothing to fear from justice, when it flows through the regular channels of law."[324]

As in the executive branch, Rush was particularly anxious that the "judicial powers of government should be wholly independant [sic] of the legislature."[325] He was critical of the Pennsylvania Constitution because it failed to achieve an independent judiciary for two reasons. Since the executive council, he reasoned, was dependent upon the assembly, "it follows of course that the Judges, who are appointed by the Council, are likewise dependant upon them." Moreover, the judges were drawn into the orbit of the assembly's influence in another way; ". . . in order more fully to

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quoted Adams' strictures on such governments--that they were liable to the same vices as individuals; that they were apt to be avaricious; that they often voted the legislature perpetual; and that they passed laws for their own benefit and interest ("Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 57-58, 58 n.).

[324]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 68, 69, 75.

[325]Ibid., p. 69.

secure their dependance upon the will of the Assembly," explained Rush,

> they are obliged to hold their salaries upon the tenure of their will. In vain do they hold their commissions for seven years. This is but the shadow of independance. They cannot live upon the air, and their absolute dependance upon the Assembly gives that body a transcendent influence over all the courts of law in the State.[326]

Thus judges took their place in the assembly's "little army of placemen."[327]

Rush considered it essential that the governor of a state, rather than local citizens, make judicial appointments, even minor ones, and therefore he condemned the 30th section in the Pennsylvania Constitution which called for the election of justices of the peace by the freeholders of each city and county. "It was not sufficient to contaminate justice at its fountain," he contended, "but its smallest streams are made to partake of impurity. . . ." Besides creating justices "totally disqualified from the want of education or leisure for the office," the local appointment of magistrates failed to consider human nature and the principles of liberty. As Rush explained, ". . . the idea of making the people at large judges of the qualifications necessary for magistrates . . . proceeds upon the supposition that mankind are all alike wise, and just. . . ." Such faith in human nature, Rush knew, was unwarranted.

[326] Ibid., p. 70.

[327] Ibid., p. 66 n.

When justices of the peace were chosen locally, many times citizens appeared before judges whom they had no hand in electing. Here citizens were "bound contrary to the principles of liberty (which consist in a man being governed by men chosen by himself). . . ." Was this true when the executive appointed justices? No, Rush contended, for with governor-appointed magistrates "it would be impossible for me to appear before the bar of a magistrate anywhere who did not derive his power originally from me." Besides, Rush asked, "Where is the difference between my choosing a Justice of Peace, and my choosing an Assemblyman and a Counsellor, by whose joint suffrages a Governor is chosen, who appoints a Justice for me? I am still the first link of the sacred chain of the power of the State."[328]

Rush's concept of federalism played an important supporting role in his republican thought. "I am zealous above all things for our Union," he wrote Elias Boudinot in 1783.[329] "The dissolution of the Union," he warned in 1809, would end "the only surviving hopes of mankind!"[330]

He firmly believed that a strong union of states was absolutely necessary for the survival of a republic. "I

[328] Ibid., pp. 70-72.

[329] Boudinot, Aug. 2, 1783, Letters, I, 308. As early as 1774, Rush recognized "a general union among the Colonies which no artifices of a ministry will be able to break" (Arthur Lee, May 4, 1774, Letters, I, 85).

[330] Adams, April 1, 1809, Letters, II, 1002.

consider Federalism and Republicanism as synonymous," he wrote John Dickinson.[331] France's help in the American war for independence, he suggested, "seems intended by heaven to teach us the necessity of a perpetual Union and Confederation. If the combined force of all the States was unequal to the power of Britain, what can be expected from the spirit or resources of any one of them?" Rush was "so perfectly satisfied that the future peace, safety, and freedom of America depended upon our Union that I view the debt of our country with pleasure, especially that part of it which we owe to ourselves." It was in his opinion "a much stronger cement of the States than the labored Articles of Confederation."[332]

Like Adams' and Madison's concept of union, Rush's was federalistic: ultimate sovereignty lay in the national government, not in the states. "If our States can be limited," he told Nathanael Greene in 1782, "we may continue our republican forms for centuries to come."[333] While a member of Continental Congress in 1776, Rush spoke out against any plan of confederation that failed to embody the principle

[331]Dickinson, Oct. 11, 1797, Letters, II, 793. He hastened to add that he did not "mean by Federalism the monarchy of Great Britain" (Ibid.). Rush praised James Wilson for his "genuine federal and republican principles" (Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514).

[332]Nathanael Greene, April 15, 1782, Letters, I, 268. Ironically, Rush later viewed speculation over the funding of the war debt as destructive of the union.

[333]Greene, Sept. 16, 1782, Letters, I, 285.

of federalism. Congressional representation, he stressed, must be based directly on the population of the States, not on the principle of equality among the several States. The Dutch Republic had declined, he suggested, because each province possessed a veto over national legislation and because each held equal voting power, thus denying equal representation for its citizens. This method of voting by states, if adopted in the American confederation, would maintain colonial distinctions, foster factions in Congress, and crush freedom. But if representation were based on population, liberty would be secure, especially since the location of the larger colonies eliminated any danger of their combining. "We have been too free with the word independence; we are dependent on each other, not totally independent states," Rush concluded, adding, "I would not have it understood that I am pleading the cause of Pennsylvania. When I entered that door, I considered myself a citizen of America."[334]

In his essay "On the Defects of the Confederation," he attacked the concept of a loosely formed confederation of sovereign, independent states. "The people of America," he argued, "have mistaken the meaning of the word sovereignty: hence each state pretends to be sovereign. In Europe it

[334]Worthington C. Ford, ed., Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (Washington, 1904-1937), VI, 1081, in Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush (Philadelphia, 1934), p. 57. See also "Travels Through Life," p. 121, 121 n. 38.

is applied only to those states which possess the power of making war and peace--of forming treaties, and the like. As this power belongs only to Congress, they are the only sovereign power in the United States." "We commit a similar mistake," continued Rush, "in our ideas of the word independent.--No individual state as such has any claim to independence. She is independent only in a union with her sister states in Congress."[335] As a delegate to the Pennsylvania convention that met in 1787 to ratify the new Constitution, Rush rejected the argument that the new government endangered the sovereignty of the States. He warned the convention that the passion for separate sovereignty had destroyed Greek civilization. A plurality of sovereignty was in government what a plurality of gods was in religion--a form of heathenism, or idolatry.[336]

Rush was convinced, then, that the theory of republican government should incorporate the principle of federalism--a strong, vigorous centralized government. Under the Articles of Confederation, he stressed, Congress lacked "coercive power." It could not issue money, regulate commerce, and, above all, make its laws binding upon the

[335]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, pp. 28-29.

[336]John Bach McMasters and Frederick D. Stone, Pennsylvania and the Federal Constitution, 1787-1788 (Philadelphia, 1888), pp. 299-300, in Goodman, Benjamin Rush, p. 79.

states.[337] Consequently, he believed that the "sole purpose" of the Annapolis Convention in 1786 should be to alter the Confederation to grant "more extensive and coercive powers to Congress."

This "increase of power in Congress," Rush felt, "is absolutely necessary for our safety and independence."[338] Moreover, the present moral depravity of the American people, he thought, proved "too plainly that the people are as much disposed to vice as their rulers, and that nothing but a vigorous and efficient government can prevent their degenerating into savages or devouring each other like beasts of prey."[339] In addition, the principle of federalism not only safeguarded freedom and controlled man's predatory instincts, but it enhanced the powers of the human mind. "The dimensions of the human mind," he maintained, utilizing once again the correspondence between individual and social health, "are apt to be regulated

[337]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 27; Richard Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 386; Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388. For Rush's discussion of the economic weaknesses of the Articles, see "Travels Through Life," p. 160.

[338]Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 386; Price, May 25, 1786, Letters, I, 388. "I had resolved and repeatedly declared," Rush wrote in his autobiography, "that I would close my political labors with the establishment of a safe and efficient general government. I considered this as an act of consistency, for to assist in making a people free, without furnishing them the means of preserving their freedom, would have been doing them more harm than good. . ." ("Travels Through Life," p. 161).

[339]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454.

by the extent and objects of the government under which it is formed. Think then . . . of the expansion and dignity the American mind will acquire by having its powers transferred from the contracted objects of a state to the more unbounded objects of a national government!--A citizen and a legislator of the free and united states of America will be one of the first characters in the world."[340]

Though not without faults, the new Constitution of the United States, Rush believed, to a great extent embodied the idea of a federalized republic.[341] It united the states successfully, for the first time, into a nation.[342]

[340]Ibid., I, 455. Rush also contrasted the effects of large and small states on mental powers when he wrote Nathanael Greene, "You must quit Rhode Island forever. It is too contracted a spot in its manners and government for a mind like yours to expand in. South Carolina will afford great scope in a few years for genius and virtue to display themselves to the greatest advantage. Human nature there is in a state of activity or, as we chemists express it, in a state of fermentation. In Rhode Island the mind of man has reached its ne plus ultra" (Greene, April 15, 1782, Letters, I, 268).

[341]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455. "I would not have you suppose," he told Ramsay, ". . . that I believe the new government to be without faults. . . . But who ever saw anything perfect come from the hands of man? It realizes notwithstanding, in a great degree, every wish I ever entertained in every stage of the Revolution for the happiness of my country, for you know that I have acquired no new opinions or principles upon the subject of republics by the sorrowful events we have lately witnessed in America" (Ibid.). The swift ratification of the Constitution, Rush noted, "under the influence of local prejudices, opposite interests, popular arts, and even the threats of bold and desperate men," was an unequivocal sign of "heaven having favored the federal side of the question" (Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, Letters, I, 475).

[342]Adams, July 2, 1788, Letters, I, 469; Boudinot, July 9, 1788, Letters, I, 475.

Since the Constitution accurately defined the powers of the national government, provided a "vigorous and compounded federal legislature," and definitely shifted the balance of power from the states to the national government, it aptly illustrated the principle of federalism.[343] If anything, the national government needed more power. Had the framers of the Constitution balanced the government more completely by granting the executive branch more power, Rush observed, "it would have realized all the wishes of the most sanguine friends to republican liberty."[344] Nevertheless, he concluded, ". . . the years of anarchy . . . are now at an end, and . . . the United States have at last adopted a national government which unites with the vigor of monarchy and the stability of aristocracy all the freedom of a simple republic."[345]

A discussion of the concepts of popular sovereignty, representation, suffrage, rotation of power through elections, and majority rule will round out Rush's analysis of the nature of republican government. The principle of

[343]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 466; Richard Price, June 2, 1787, Letters, I, 418; Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454-455.

[344]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522. See Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1155.

[345]"Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 556. But see James Madison, Letters, I, 543, where Rush pessimistically rejects this idealistic view of the new government. It should be noted too that Rush was aware of the divisive sectional interests in the young nation. See Price, Oct. 27, 1786, Letters, I, 408; Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1167-1168; Adams, April 10, 1813, Letters, II, 1192.

popular sovereignty, Rush stressed, was scientifically sound. Again he made use, as he so frequently did in his political writings, of the scientific analogy. If God made "the beauty and harmony of the universe" contingent on "the universal and mutual dependence" of its parts, then it followed that government also was "dependent on those for whose benefit alone all government should exist."[346] As he remarked, ". . . my reading, observations and reflexions have tended more and more to shew the absurdity of hereditary power, and to prove that no form of government can be rational but that which is derived from the Suffrages of the people who are the subjects of it."[347]

The people, declared Rush, should "be the sovereigns of their rulers and hold all their rights in their own hands," but this "humble and true origin of power in the people, is often forgotten in the splendor and pride of governments."[348] Rush, however, qualified this concept in his philosophy of republican government; it did not mean that the people at large were to participate directly in lawmaking or judging. Such an idea, he suggested, "destroys the necessity for all government," because "Government supposes and requires a delegation of power: It cannot

[346]Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), pp. 67-68.

[347]"Travels Through Life," p. 46.

[348]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453; "Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 174.

exist without it." Part of the difficulty, he thought, lay in the failure to distinguish between sovereignty "derived from the people" and sovereignty "seated in the people."[349] The latter idea, he contended, "is unhappily expressed," for the people possessed political power "only on the days of their elections. After this, it is the property of their rulers, nor can they exercise or resume it, unless it is abused."[350] "What man," asked Rush, "ever made himself his own attorney? And yet this would not be more absurd than for the people at large to pretend to give up their power to a set of rulers, and afterwards reserve the right of making and of judging of all their laws themselves." A republican government formed on such principles therefore was a monstrosity in nature.[351]

Though the citizen was indeed "the first link of the sacred chain of the power of the State," nevertheless, he delegated this power to elected representatives.[352] A republican government, in contrast to a simple democracy, was representative in form. Political power, Rush explained, was distributed and divided among legislative representatives and executive and judicial officers; it remained their property until they were removed from office

[349]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[350]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 28.

[351]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 71.

[352]Ibid., pp. 71, 72.

by elections or, when power was abused, by virtue of the right to revolution, expressed in the social contract theory.[353] Moreover, "in order to render liberty equal and durable in our country," Rush argued, government must base its representation on numbers, or population. He opposed, therefore, the provision in the Articles of Confederation that gave each state one vote only, because it denied equal representation for all citizens in the nation, those in small states receiving greater representation for their votes.[354]

Thus Rush saw representation as one of the "two securities for liberty in any government."[355] A system of equal representation safeguarded the rights of the people. "The factions, seditions, and rebellions of republics," he explained, "arise . . . from a defect of equal representation."[356] "Where representation is equal," there were

[353]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 28.

[354]"Travels Through Life," p. 121. Rush debated this in Congress on August 1, 1776 (Ibid., p. 121 n. 38). For a summary of his speech, see Goodman, pp. 57-58. In a letter to Robert Morris in 1777, he wrote that if "this unjust representation" in the Confederation was not changed, "it will end sooner or later in the ruin of the continent" (Morris, Feb. 22, 1777, Letters, I, 135). "When I expressed a wish," Rush told Adams, "for a union in principle and conduct of Massachusetts, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, I wished only for the predominance of numbers and property in the legislative and executive parts of our government" (Adams, June 4, 1789, Letters, I, 514).

[355]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453.

[356]Ibid.; Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

"no factions," but where it was unequal, factions "produce their effects like the unequal loading of a ship or circulation of the blood." The principle of equality applied to representation, then, "must produce happiness and order."[357]

The subject of suffrage was important to Rush. "That republic is sophisticated with monarchy or aristocracy," he wrote in 1798, "that does not revolve upon the wills of the people. . . ."[358] He firmly believed that the citizen's right to choose his rulers was a fundamental principle in a republic.[359] Yet, deeply aware of human depravity, he also believed that the "cheapness of suffrage" often resulted in a loss of liberty in the United States.[360] Education alone could resolve the dilemma; only a morally and rationally enlightened electorate could choose its representatives wisely. The wills of the people "must be fitted to each other by means of education before they can be made to produce regularity and unison in government."[361] "The benefits of free schools," Rush maintained, "should not be overlooked. Indeed, suffrage in my opinion

[357]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 198, June 10, 1791.

[358]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92.

[359]"Observations," 1777, p. 72; Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 523.

[360]Adams, Oct. 2, 1810, Letters, II, 1067.

[361]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92.

should never be permitted to a man that could not write or read."[362]

Several positive benefits, Rush believed, accrued from frequent elections. For example, they helped to prevent violence and rebellion, "for where men can remove the evils of their governments by frequent elections, they will seldom appeal to the less certain remedies of mobs or arms."[363] In addition, elections aided the mental and physical health of the human species, because they "shake the public mind, improve the understanding, from influence of Passions on the understanding, promote longevity."[364] "Elective and representative governments," he observed, were "most favourable" not only to individual and national prosperity but also "to animal life."[365]

On the other hand, Rush was aware of the evils of too frequent rotation of political office. As he explained in his criticism of the Articles of Confederation,

> The custom of turning men out of power or office, as soon as they are qualified for it, has been found to be as absurd in practice, as it is virtuous in speculation. It contradicts our habits and opinions in every other transaction of life. Do we dismiss a general--a physician--or even a domestic as soon as they have acquired knowledge enough to be useful to

[362]Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096.

[363]"Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 557.

[364]"1789-1791," p. 199, June 10, 1791.

[365]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 168.

> us, for the sake of increasing the number of able generals--skilful [sic] physicians--and faithful servants? We do not. Government is a science; and can never be perfected in America, until we encourage men to devote not only three years, but their whole lives to it. I believe the principal reason why so many men of abilities object to serving in Congress, is owing to their not thinking it worth while to spend three years in acquiring a profession which their country immediately afterwards forbids them to follow.[366]

Rush, therefore, advocated a seven- to eleven-year term of office for the President of the United States.[367]

During the most conservative period of his political life he vigorously denounced frequent elections in the text of an address to ministers on morals, printed in the American Museum in 1788:

> Frequent elections produce idleness, tempt to drunkenness, and prove the seeds of calumnies, falsehoods, and quarrels among citizens and neighbors. Let ministers of the gospel use their influence to have those parts of all our governments mended which encourage the too frequent meeting of our people for these melancholy purposes. Liberty can exist only in the society of virtue. In our attachment to frequent elections as a means of preserving our liberties, we pull down with one hand more than we build up with the other.[368]

Rush held these extreme views only temporarily, for once

[366]"On the Defects," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 28. Article V reads in part: ". . . and no person shall be capable of being a delegate for more than three years in any term of six years. . . ." (From the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution, ed. Carl J. Friedrich and Robert G. McCloskey, New York, 1954, pp. 10-11).

[367]Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1155.

[368]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 467 n. 3.

again he supported frequent elections in 1790 and 1791, and deleted the passage when he revised the address for the Essays (1798).[369]

Though Rush believed majority rule was necessary in republican governments, he qualified his faith in it. He opposed, of course, a government in which "the minority would give laws to a majority." Such a situation was a "solecism in government."[370] Yet majority rule was not automatically just. Education provided the key to successful rule by majority in a republic. "In the uncultivated state of reason," wrote Rush, "the opinions and beliefs of a majority of mankind will be wrong. In the cultivated state of reason, just opinions and feelings will become general."[371]

[369]"Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 557; "1789-1791," p. 199, June 10, 1791; "To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 467 n. 3.

[370]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 74.

[371]"Thoughts on Common Sense," Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1798), p. 252; Macklin Thomas, "The Idea of Progress in the Writings of Franklin, Freneau, Barlow, and Rush (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1938), p. 236; Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, p. 103.

VII. Rush's Analysis of Natural and Civil Liberties

Now that we have examined Rush's views on the nature of republican governments, we should consider the ends of government he believed republicanism best attained--the rights and liberties of the people. As Rush's statement that ". . . liberty is the object and life of all republican governments" implied, natural and civil liberties deeply concerned him[372]; they were the fundamental goals of America's struggle for independence. "Independence," he wrote John Dunlap in 1779, ". . . is not the end of the present struggle; it is only one of the means of establishing our liberties, and even peace itself is not the object of the present war. It is LIBERTY."[373]

Accepting the natural rights doctrine implicitly and viewing it as the basis of the social contract theory, Rush believed that man's inalienable rights consisted of life, liberty, property, and equality,[374] and that the sole object of political compacts was to secure and maintain

[372]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 88; "A true republican," Rush wrote, "cherishes no passion but a love for liberty" (Nathanael Greene, April 15, 1782, Letters, I, 269).

[373]Dunlap, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 235.

[374]Anthony Wayne, April 2, 1777, Letters, I, 137; "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 68, 70; "Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88; "On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 6.

these rights.[375] In a hypothetical state of nature, he theorized, "Every man possesses an absolute power over his own liberty and property. . . . When he becomes a member of political society, he commits the disposal of his liberty and property to his fellow citizens; but as he has no right to dispose of his life, he cannot commit the power over it to any body of men. To take away life, therefore, . . . is a violation of the first political compact."[376]

The word disposal is puzzling here, but Rush probably used it in the sense of "controlling" natural liberty without the idea of "abusing" or "destroying" it (as the word is sometimes used)--an interpretation borne out by the fact he used the phrase commit the power over in the same sense as commits the disposal of, and by his assertion, in the essay on the Pennsylvania Constitution, that political compacts contained "the great principles of natural and civil liberty" which were "unalterable by any human power." Thus laws "cease to be binding whenever they transgress the principles of Liberty, as laid down in the Constitution and Bill of Rights."[377]

Perhaps he also had in mind the exchange of natural freedom for civil liberty under law, a kind of liberty which

[375]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 283.

[376]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 35.

[377]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 54.

curtailed individual freedom for the common good of the community.[378] "It would have been a truth," Rush wrote, in enunciating the relationship between liberty and law, "if Mr. Locke had not said it, that where there is no law there can be no liberty; and nothing deserves the name of law but that which is certain and universal in its operation upon all the members of the community."[379]

Though Rush saw the importance of restraining individual liberty for the good of society as a whole, he was well aware of the dangers involved in such a policy. "When natural liberty is given up for laws which enslave

[378]See Thomas Percival, Oct. 26, 1786, Letters, I, 400. In A Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches (1717), one of the first American expressions of the social contract theory, John Wise expounded on this exchange: "Every man considered in a natural state, must be allowed to be free, and at his own dispose; yet to suit mans inclinations to society; and in a peculiar manner to gratify the necessity he is in of public rule and order, he is impelled to enter into a civil community; and divests himself of his natural freedom, and puts himself under government; which amongst other things comprehends the power of life and death over him; together with authority to anjoyn him some things to which he has an utter aversion, and to prohibit him other things, for which he may have as strong an inclination; so that he may be often under this authority, obliged to sacrifice his private, for the public good. So that though man is inclined to society, yet he is driven to a combination by great necessity. For that the true and leading cause of forming governments, and yielding up natural liberty, and throwing mans equality into a common pile to be new cast by the rules of fellowship; was really and truly to guard themselves against the injuries men were lyable to interchangeably. . . (Roy Harvey Pearce, ed., Colonial American Writing, New York, 1950, p. 326).

[379]David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455, 455 n. 5.

instead of protecting us, we are immense losers by the exchange." Even "the blessings of civilization" did not "compensate for the sacrifice we make . . . of natural liberty."[380] The trouble with tyrannical governments which blended legislative, executive, and judical powers together in one ruler or in a single legislative body was that hasty and passionate decisions might remove an individual's liberty, property, and life. But in free governments, whose powers were balanced and divided, "the most inconsiderable portion of our liberty and property cannot be taken from us without the judgment of two or three courts."[381]

Liberty, Rush believed, was the most basic of the natural rights of man, for it was "the object and life of all republican governments."[382] He frequently drew upon economic and scientific arguments, in order to defend the importance of liberty. It was one of "those rights of mankind" which formed "the basis of abundance and agriculture" in society. Agriculture never flourished, he observed, where liberty was "not fully established." "Such is the will of the great Author of Nature," he concluded, "who has created man free, and assigned to him

[380]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 283.

[381]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 68, 70.

[382]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88.

the earth, that he might cultivate his possession with the sweat of his brow; but still should enjoy his Liberty."[383] In his Lectures on Animal Life (1799), Rush remarked that liberty was one of the most invigorating stimuli for promoting health and longevity in society. "Many facts," he contended, "prove, animal life to exist in a larger quantity and for a longer time, in the enlightened and happy state of Connecticut, in which republican liberty has existed above one hundred and fifty years, than in any other country. . . ."[384] He emphasized this aspect of liberty when he rejected Adams' concept of mixed government: "There cannot be a greater absurdity than to connect together in one government the living principle of liberty in the people with the deadly principle of tyranny in an hereditary monarch."[385]

As a young man, Rush was unqualified in his praise of liberty. As early as 1769 he confessed to Catharine Macaulay that he had "made great progress in the love of liberty; for this . . . was among the first passions that warmed my breast."[386] As he explained to the English

[383]"On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 6. See Ibid., p. 9.

[384]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 168.

[385]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 522.

[386]Macaulay, Jan. 18, 1769, Letters, I, 71. Catharine (Sawbridge) Macaulay, later Mrs. Macaulay Graham (1731-1791), the author of many political tracts, wrote The History of England, from the Accession of James I to That

historian, liberty was the panacea for civilization:

> Political freedom includes in it every other blessing. All the pleasures of riches, science, virtue, and even religion itself derive their value from liberty alone. No wonder therefore wise and prudent legislators have in all ages been held in such great veneration; and no wonder too those illustrious souls who have employed their pens and sacrificed their lives in defense of liberty have met with such universal applause. Their reputations, like some majestic river which enlarges and widens as it approaches its parent ocean, shall become greater and greater through every age and outlive the ruins of the world itself.[387]

Liberty, Rush thought, brought out the best in human nature. "The love of liberty," he told Adams in 1777, "is the only principle of action that will make a man uniform in his conduct and support him under the heaviest calamities that can befall his country."[388]

In a letter to William Gordon in 1778, Rush praised liberty in messianic terms:

> I long to see the image of God restored to the human mind. I long to see virtue and religion supported, and vice and irreligion banished from society by wise and equitable governments. I long to see an asylum prepared for the persecuted and oppressed of all countries, and a door opened for the progress of knowledge, literature, the arts, and the gospel of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. And these great events are only to be

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of the Brunswick Line, 1763-1783, in order to refute David Hume's tory interpretation of English history. It gained her an immense if fleeting reputation; consequently she acquired many American acquaintances and correspondents, and in 1785 visited Rush, Washington, and others in the United States (Letters, I, 71 n. 1).

[387] Ibid., I, 70.

[388] Adams, Aug. 8, 1777, Letters, I, 152.

> accomplished by establishing and perpetuating liberty in our country. O! blest of blessings! Who would not follow thee blindfold? Who would not defend thee from the treachery of friends as well as from the malice of enemies? But I must stop. When liberty--the liberty we loved and contended for in the years 1774 and 1775--is my subject, I know not where to begin nor where to end. O! come celestial stranger, and dwell in this our land. Let not our ignorance, our venality, our luxury, our idolatry to individuals, and our other anti-republican vices provoke thee to forsake the temple our ancestors prepared for thee. Put us not off with Great Britain's acknowledging our independence. Alas! the great ultimatum of our modern patriots. It is liberty alone that can make us happy. And without it the memorable 4th of July 1776 will be execrated by posterity as the day in which Pandora's box was opened in this country.[389]

Nevertheless, even these high tributes to liberty contained the seeds of Rush's gradual disillusion. Events rapidly demonstrated to him that "our ignorance, our venality, our idolatry to individuals, and our other anti-republican vices" had indeed opened Pandora's box. Pennsylvania politics, especially that relating to the Constitution of 1776, confirmed for Rush the truth of the idea that ". . . there is a union in politics which is fatal to liberty," and while in 1782 he did not think wealth acquired by business, unless it was "in the souls of men," necessarily injured liberty, he soon believed he saw Hamilton's funding system

[389] Gordon, Dec. 10, 1778, Letters, I, 221-222. "O! liberty, liberty, I have worshipped thee as a substance and have found thee so" (Walter Jones, July 3, 1776, Letters, I, 108, 109 n. 2).

destroy men's souls.[390] Thus he tempered his faith in liberty, or rather in men's ability to preserve it.

Turning with greater frequency to Christianity as the one hope for perpetuating liberty, he remarked to Adams that "Did its mild and gentle spirit prevail in our country, it would do more towards rendering our liberty perpetual than the purest republic that my imagination . . . could devise."[391] Without religion "there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty. . . ."[392] His only hope for "suffering and depressed humanity," he confessed to Adams in 1806, was a new divine order to be introduced by Christianity. "Civilization, science, and commerce," he maintained,

> have long ago failed in their attempts to improve the condition of mankind, and even liberty itself, from which more was expected than from all other human means, has lately appeared to be insufficient for that purpose. If we fly from the lion of despotism, the bear of anarchy meets us, or if we retire from both and lean our hand upon the wall of our domestic sanctuary, the recollection of past or the dread of future evils bites us like a serpent.[393]

The natural fact of equality was also important to the Jeffersonian since it formed one of the bases of his

[390]Horatio Gates, Feb. 4, 1778, Letters, I, 198; Greene, Sept. 16, 1782, Letters, I, 285.

[391]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545. See also Jefferson, Aug. 22, 1800, Letters, II, 820-821.

[392]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88.

[393]Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

political philosophy.[394] The Jeffersonian believed that the creation of man irrevocably established the equality of humankind.[395] "The history of the creation of man," Rush declared, in supporting the idea of the equality of the human species, "and of the relation of our species to each other by birth, which is recorded in the Old Testament, is the best refutation that can be given to the divine right of kings, and the strongest argument that can be used in favor of the original and natural equality of all mankind."[396] In his "The Bible as a School Book," he contended that "this divine book, above all others, favours that equality among mankind, that respect for just laws, and all those sober and frugal virtues, which constitute the soul of republicanism."[397]

[394]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), p. 61, notes that the affirmation of equality in the Declaration of Independence "was not a direct statement of moral principle, but rather of a scientific and historical fact from which the principle was supposed to follow: 'All men are created equal.'" Boorstin quotes Jefferson's earlier draft to emphasize this point: "We hold these truths to be sacred & undeniable; that all men are created equal & independent, that from that equal creation they derive rights inherent & inalienable. . . ."

[395]Ibid., p. 61.

[396]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88; quoted in Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 61. The doctrine of universal salvation, Rush believed, "establishes the equality of mankind. . ." (Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, Letters, I, 584). See also "Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), pp. 342, 343.

[397]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 130; quoted in Boorstin, p. 265 n. 3.

The demonstration that all men were members of the same species and that variations among them were due to environmental causes, not to differences inherent at creation, would confirm most strikingly the indestructible equality of mankind. Consequently, Jeffersonians, like Rush, Benjamin Smith Barton, and Thomas Paine, speculated a good deal on the single original source for all men. The Jeffersonian particularly wanted to show that the Indian and the Negro were not results of separate creation--a view that discredited the theory of the unity of the human species--but of the influence of environment.[398]

Rush frequently discussed racial variations between white and red men. He saw no reason why environment had not produced the Indian's color.[399] But he could not so easily explain the wide discrepancy between the white man's stage of civilization and the Indian's--a fact opponents of human equality used to prove that the red race was a separate and inferior species.[400] He rejected the assertion that the "vacant countenances" and "long and disgusting taciturnity" of Indians proved their innate inferiority; they were "the effects of the want of action in their brains

[398]See Boorstin, pp. 59-108, for an extensive discussion of this subject.

[399]"The Influence of Physical Causes in Promoting an Increase of Strength and Activity of the Intellectual Faculties of Man," 1799, Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 116ff.

[400]Boorstin, p. 85.

from a deficiency of ideas," in turn caused by a lack of external stimuli.[401] "The weakness of the intellects in certain savage and barbarous nations . . . is as much the effect of the want of physical influence upon their minds, as a disagreeable colour and figure are of its action upon their bodies."[402] Their tranquillity under situations of anger, pleasure, or grief was "the result of an absence of passion," due to their custom of never displaying affections outwardly. A primitive environment which, contrary to Rousseau's account, was unfavorable to the growth of the understanding and passions produced these defects in the Indian's character, then. Adding a cold climate and customs "contrary to moral and physical happiness" to these circumstances further explained Indians' inferiority without resorting to the theory of special creation.[403]

The Indian's weakness for alcohol, Rush argued in his "Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind," illustrated once more "the different employments, situations, and conditions of the body and mind, which predispose to the love of those liquors."[404]

[401]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 164; Boorstin, p. 86.

[402]"Intellectual Faculties," 1799, Sixteen Introductory Lectures, pp. 116ff.; quoted in Boorstin, p. 86.

[403]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 164-165; Boorstin, p. 86.

[404]"Effects of Ardent Spirits," Medical Inquiries and Observations (Philadelphia, 1815), I, 164; Boorstin, p. 267 n. 18.

Enumerating Indians' moral weaknesses in his "Account of the Vices peculiar to the Indians of North America," he nowhere suggested that they originated from other than environmental sources.[405] He also remarked that the Indian's susceptibility to certain diseases, far from proving his innate weakness, merely demonstrated again the influence of environment and custom.[406] Thus Rush refuted "the objection which has been urged against the Mosaic account of the whole human race being descended from a single pair."[407]

It was not so simple, however, for the Jeffersonian scientist to show that the Negro's physical differences and primitive cultural development were merely environmental variations within a single human species. Rush's scantily supported yet dogmatically asserted "Observations intended to favour a supposition that the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is derived from the Leprosy" was one of the most ingenious attempts to prove the Negro's membership in the original family of man, and thus to argue "scientifically" for human equality. Basing his study partly on clinical observations in the Pennsylvania Hospital and

[405]"Vices Peculiar to Indians," Essays, Literary, Moral, & Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1798), pp. 257-262; Boorstin, p. 267 n. 18.

[406]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 256-265; Boorstin, p. 86.

[407]"Intellectual Faculties," 1799, Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 116ff.; Boorstin, p. 86.

partly on common experience, he concluded that the Negro's black color resulted not from any original difference in his race but from ancestral affliction with leprosy. After noting that the Negro's thick lips, flat nose, black skin, and insensibility of nerves were actual symptoms of leprosy, he asserted, to account for the survival of the Negro's color from ancient times, that among diseases it was the most permanently inheritable. But Negroes rarely infected others with the disease, since in the 18th century it had ceased to be contagious. Even the Negro's present health and long life presented no obstacle to his theory because local diseases of the skin seldom affected general health or longevity.

To Rush, an ardent abolitionist, several conclusions seemed inevitable if his thesis were true:

> 1. That all the claims of superiority of the whites over the blacks, on account of their color, are founded alike in ignorance and inhumanity. If the color of the negroes be the effect of a disease, instead of inviting us to tyrannise over them, it should entitle them to a double portion of our humanity, for disease all over the world has always been the signal for immediate and universal compassion.
> 2. The facts and principles which have been delivered, should teach white people the necessity of keeping up that prejudice against such connections with them, as would tend to infect posterity with any portion of their disorder. This may be done upon the ground I have mentioned without offering violence to humanity, or calling in question the samness of descent, or natural equality of mankind.

Finally, and most significantly, Rush maintained, "We shall render the belief of the whole human race being descended

from one pair, easy, and universal, and thereby not only add weight to the Christian revelation, but remove a material obstacle to the exercise of that universal benevolence which is inculcated by it."[408]

Despite his firm belief in equality, Rush knew that, from the viewpoint of human depravity, "perfect equality, and an equal distribution of property, wisdom and virtue" was an assumption not always verified by human experience.[409] Thus, in spite of his efforts to prove that the Negro's

[408]Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, IV (Philadelphia, 1799), 289ff.: Read to Society, July 14, 1792; summarized in Boorstin, pp. 89-92. It was inconceivable to Rush that the normal skin color of a healthy member of humankind was anything other than white. This assumption lay behind his whole search for a "cure" to the Negro's color so that he might again wear the white color of the human species (Ibid., p. 92). Rush, in his essay "On Slave-Keeping," argued "in favor of the Intellects of the Negroes, or of their capacities for virtue and happiness, although these have been supposed by some to be inferior to those of the inhabitants of Europe. The accounts which travellers give us of their ingenuity, humanity, and strong attachment to their parents, relations, friend, and country, show us that they are equal to the Europeans, when we allow for the diversity of temper and genius which is occasioned by climate. We have many well attested anecdotes of as sublime and disinterested virtue among them as ever adorned a Roman or a Christian character. But we are to distinguish between an African in his own country, and an African in a state of slavery in America. Slavery is so foreign to the human mind, that the moral faculties, as well as those of the understanding are debased, and rendered torpid by it. All the vices which are charged upon Negroes in the southern colonies and the West-Indies, such as Idleness, Treachery, Theft, and the like, are the genuine offspring of slavery, and serve as an argument to prove they were not intended, by Providence for it" ("On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, pp. 3-4.

[409]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 55.

black color was not a mark of the Creator's original displeasure, he urged white men to delay social and political equality with Negroes until medical science cured their leprosy.[410]

In his essay on the Pennsylvania Constitution, he affirmed his conviction--not unlike Jefferson's--that environment and circumstances created differences in industry and talent which inevitably produced inequalities in mankind:

> It has often been said, that there is but one rank of men in America. . . . I agree, that we have no artificial distinctions of men into noblemen and commoners among us, but it ought to be remarked, that superior degrees of industry and capacity, and above all, commerce, have introduced inequality of property among us, and these have introduced natural distinctions of rank in Pennsylvania, as certain and general as the artificial distinctions of men in Europe. This will ever be the case while commerce exists in this country.[411]

Furthermore, nationalism modified, to an extent, the actual application of the equality of the human species. The republican citizen, Rush explained,

> must be taught to love his fellow creatures in every part of the world, but he must cherish with a more intense and peculiar affection, the citizens of Pennsylvania and of the United States. I do not wish to see our youth educated with a single prejudice against any nation or country; but we impose a task upon human nature, repugnant alike to reason, revelation and the ordinary dimensions of the

[410]Boorstin, p. 98.

[411]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 63.

> human heart, when we require him to embrace with equal affection, the whole family of mankind.[412]

Security for the natural right of property was also an important responsibility for republican governments.[413] Rush criticized Pennsylvania's Constitution because it provided only "a temporary security for property."[414] Its single assembly, he pointed out, possessed unlimited power to forfeit the property of every individual in the state, but in a free government containing a bicameral legislature, property was so secure that only well-defined legal processes could remove it.[415] Moreover, the Pennsylvania test laws (1777), which deprived non-jurors of civil rights, including the right to transfer real estate, ignored property rights.[416]

Not only were the courts, Rush believed, an important bulwark for property rights, but also the upper house of a compound legislature, since it represented men of overgrown property.[417] As Rush moved toward conservatism in

[412]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 90.

[413]See David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454.

[414]Adams, April 28, 1780, Letters, I, 253.

[415]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 68, 70.

[416]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 158, 158 n. 2. In 1784 Rush published an attack against these laws, Considerations upon the present Test-Law of Pennsylvania: Addressed to the Legislature and Freemen of the State (Philadelphia, 1784). He saw Franklin's election to the Pennsylvania governorship as "a fortunate change in the representation" of the state "in favor of the . . . property of the state" (John Erskine, Oct. 25, 1785, Letters, I, 374-375).

[417]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 63, 68.

his political thought in the late 1780's, he tended to value property rights more highly. Hinting that he agreed with John Adams on the subject, he wrote Richard Price in 1786 that "The vi[gorous] good sense and the property of our count[ry are] coming forth daily and seizing upon power and offices. The scum which was thrown upon the surface by the fermentation of the war is daily sinking, while a pure spirit is occupying its place."[418]

Rush's concept of property and wealth was essentially agrarian, much like Jefferson's. The value of property, he believed, was based on an almost intangible relationship between the land and the free individual who worked it. He felt that education should seek to "establish early ideas of a connection between industry and property. . . ."[419] Where the settler on the frontier, Rush argued, frequently failed to extract from the earth all it was capable of producing, the true farmer, through "patience, industry, and labor," gained "affluence, independence, and happiness."[420] In his address "On Slave-Keeping" (1773), he enunciated an agrarian concept of property, in the context of a discussion of freedom and slavery:

[418]Price, April 22, 1786, Letters, I, 386.

[419]"Travels Through Life," p. 33. Rush criticized Hamilton's program for funding the Revolutionary War debt because it robbed the original certificate holders of their property "and gave it to men who had neither earned nor deserved it. . . ("Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 200).

[420]Thomas Percival, Oct. 26, 1786, Letters, I, 403, 404.

> Liberty and property form the basis of abundance, and good agriculture: I never observed it to flourish where those rights of mankind were not firmly established. The earth which multiplies her productions with a kind of profusion, under the hands of the free-born laborer seems to shrink into barrenness under the sweat of the slave. Such is the will of the great Author of our Nature, who has created man free, and assigned to him the earth, that he might cultivate his possession with the sweat of his brow; but still should enjoy his Liberty.[421]

To the success-formula which combined liberty, agrarianism, and unlimited land, Rush added the final, necessary ingredient--Puritan morality:

> From the numerous competitions in every branch of business in Europe, success in any pursuit may be looked upon in the same light as a prize in a lottery. But the case is widely different in America. Here there is room enough for every human talent and virtue to expand and flourish. This is so invariably true that I believe there is not an instance to be found of an industrious, frugal, prudent European with sober manners who has not been successful in business in this country.[422]

Since the individual should gain wealth solely through the exercise of Puritan virtue, "unearned" wealth through speculation "will be a lasting monument of the efficacy of idleness, speculation, and fraud above industry, economy, and integrity in obtaining wealth. . . ."[423] A person who acquired wealth honestly in agriculture, however,

[421]"On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 6.

[422]"Information to Europeans," April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 556.

[423]James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 539. See Montgomery, March 27, 1789, Letters, I, 510 n. 1..

benefited the community, if he acted as a steward: ". . . to enjoy the highest and only rational pleasure that wealth can confer--I mean the luxury of doing good."[424] Better yet, Rush suggested, moderate prices, prudent credit, and "the safety from our laws of every species of property" brought property ownership within the reach of all citizens.[425] Reasonably sized plantations, owned and worked by freemen, created a situation "which by diminishing opulence in a few, would suppress luxury and vice, and promote that equal distribution of property, which appears best calculated to promote the welfare of society."[426]

Thus ownership of property, Rush believed, helped to stabilize society and government; conversely licentious behavior and disregard for the laws of society would likely deprive a person of property. When Rush, in his "An Account of the Progress of Population, Agriculture, Manners, and Government in Pennsylvania," contrasted three types of settlers on the frontier, he anticipated Timothy Dwight's association of property with virtue and character in Travels in New-England and New York (1821) and Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on frontier democracy.[427] The first

[424]John Nicholson, Aug. 12, 1793, Letters, II, 637; "1792-1813," pp. 253, Jan. 17, 1801; 268-269, Feb. 7 and March, 1804.

[425]Thomas Percival, Oct. 26, 1786, Letters, I, 404.

[426]"On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 6.

[427]Thomas Percival, Oct. 20, 1786, Letters, I, 400-403. Dwight argued that even the shiftless foresters "become

wave of settler, having outlived his credit in the cultivated parts of the state, established a rather crude existence somewhat patterned after the Indian's. Usually a tenant to some landholder, he refused to improve the land and left it as civilization advanced toward him. That the approach of Christianity accelerated the flight of these people, Rush noted, "will not surprise us when we consider how opposite its precepts are to their licentious manner of living." "Above all," he observed, this kind of settler "revolts against the operation of laws. He cannot bear to surrender up a single natural right for all the benefits of government, and therefore he abandons his little settlement and seeks a retreat in the woods. . . ."

The second type of settler, "generally a man of some property," developed his plantation to a greater extent than did the first. But "this species of settler," Rush stressed, "by no means extracts all from the earth which it is capable of giving," and his slipshod farm "bears many marks of a weak tone of mind." "Seldom a good member of civil or religious society," he was "indisposed to support civil government; with high ideas of liberty, he refuses to bear his proportion of the debt contracted by its establishment in our country." The third species of settler, in sharp contrast to the first two classes, was "commonly a man of property and good character," and because

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sober, industrious citizens merely by the acquisition of property. The love of property to a certain degree seems indispensable to the existence of sound morals" (The American Mind, ed. Harry R. Warfel, Ralph H. Gabriel, and Stanley T. Williams, 2nd ed., New York, 1963, p. 227).

he turned the wilderness into civilization, he was the only class worthy of the term farmer. Associating property with strength of character and orderly social institutions, Rush contended that in proportion as the farmer

> increases in wealth, he values the protection of laws. Hence he punctually pays his taxes towards the support of government. Schools and churches likewise, as the means of promoting order and happiness in society, derive a due support from him; for benevolence and public spirit as to these objects are the natural offspring of affluence and independence. . . . If they possess less refinement than their southern neighbors who cultivate their lands with slaves, they possess more republican virtue.[428]

But great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few and privileged property rights which excluded personal liberties, Rush knew, presented grave dangers to the young nation. If wealth based on the proper use of the land was moral and healthy, wealth acquired through speculation on bank stock and, above all, through Hamilton's Funding System, produced, Rush was convinced, all the social, political, and moral ills of the nation.[429] "The funding

[428]Thomas Percival, Oct. 26, 1786, Letters, I, 403.

[429]For background on Hamilton's Funding System and speculation in 1791-1792, see Corner, ed. "Appendix 2," Autobiography, pp. 366-368; Letters, I, 541 n. 2, 544 n. 1. Rush's critical comments on Hamilton's plan for funding the war debt were frequent. See "1789-1791," pp. 200, 203-206, 217-219, 227; James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 538-539; Madison, April 10, 1790, Letters, I, 542-543; Madison, July 17, 1790, Letters, I, 568; Thomas Fitzsimons, Aug. 5, 1790, Letters, I, 569; Julia Rush, Aug. 12, 1791, Letters, I, 602-603; Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 902-903; Adams, Jan. 6, 1805, Letters, II, 902-903; Adams, Jan. 6, 1805, Letters, II, 913; Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 963; Adams, Dec. 21, 1810, Letters, II, 1073; Adams, Sept. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1105; Adams, June 27, 1812, Letters, II, 1145.

system," he maintained, "was the 'pomum Adami' of all the evils which now threaten the liberties and happiness of the United States. It created our canine appetite for wealth. It reduced regular industry and virtuous economy to the rank of sniveling virtues, and rendered 'enterprise and successful speculation' the only mark of civic worth in our country."[430]

Rush's explanation for the evils of speculation was simply that inherently depraved men loved the power that came with wealth. "Two propositions," Rush declared,

> . . . have never been controverted: First, where there is wealth, there will be power; and, secondly, the rich have always been an over-match for the poor in all contests for power.
>
> . . . . The influence of wealth at elections is irresistible. . . . there are poor men among us as prepared to be influenced, as the rich are prepared to influence them. The fault must be laid in both cases upon human nature. The consequence of a majority of rich

[430]Adams, Dec. 21, 1810, Letters, II, 1073. "Were I permitted to coin a word suggested by my patient's remark, I would say we were a 'bedollared nation.' In walking our streets I have often been struck with the principal subjects of conversation of our citizens. Seldom have I heard a dozen words of which 'Dollar, discount, and a good Spec' did not compose a part. . . . St. Paul places covetousness and uncleanness together as improper subjects of conversation. But not only our streets but our parlors are constantly vocal with the language of a broker's office, and even at our convivial dinners 'Dollars' are a standing dish upon which all feed with rapacity and gluttony" (Adams, June 13, 1808, Letters, II, 966-967). "But not only the seeds of political disputes but of our vices were sown during the same [Washington's] administration, by the funding system and the passion for banks which was created by the profits of script and of the immense interest of the Bank of the United States" (Adams, June 27, 1812, Letters, II, 1145).

> men getting into the legislature is plain. Their wealth will administer fuel to the love of arbitrary power that is common to all men.[431]

Speculation and the hoarding of wealth, Rush concluded, laid the foundation for aristocracy; republican governments, to remain free of economic corruption, must harmonize property rights with equality and liberty and must encourage a more equitable distribution of wealth.[432]

For one so convinced that maintaining natural rights was the primary object of compact governments, and equally sure that republican governments most completely realized it, Rush ought to have viewed a bill of rights as essential to any constitution. To some extent he did, but the fact remains he vigorously opposed the addition of a bill of rights to the Federal Constitution.

[431]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 62-63. It was Rush's "conviction that the laws of property were as exactly ascertained as the laws of matter, and that power and wealth would never long be separated" (Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 532).

[432]Ibid., p. 63; James Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 539. When Rush reviewed the economic affairs of the new nation in 1812, he maintained that the nation had failed to keep property in bounds: "It is too high an honor to call us a nation of shopkeepers. It would be more proper to call us a nation of peddlers. The funding system, founded in rapine and fraud, begat universal speculation, speculation begat banks, and banks have ruined our country. A city in flames kindled by the hand of war is not so melancholy a sight as a whole nation absorbed in the love of money, nor is a field of battle covered with dead bodies so awful a spectacle as a nation deliberately preferring slavery to liberty, and peace and commerce to national independence" (Adams, Aug. 8, 1812, Letters, II, 1158-1159).

In 1777, Rush openly favored bills of rights that contained provisions for religious toleration, trial by jury, rotation of office, and habeas corpus. In his Observations upon the Present Government of Pennsylvania, he argued that a bill of rights containing "the great principles of natural and civil liberty," "unalterable by any human power," was one of the three essential parts of every free government. He praised the Bill of Rights in the Pennsylvania Constitution for its "many excellent articles," although he criticized it for confounding "natural and civil rights in such a manner as to produce endless confusion in society."[433]

Nevertheless, in little more than a decade, Rush so radically altered his position that he opposed the adoption of the first ten amendments to the Constitution of the United States. In a widely circulated letter to David Ramsay in 1788, he explained his objection to a bill of rights:

> There can be only two securities for liberty in any government, viz., representation and checks. By the first the rights of the people, and by the second the rights of representation, are effectually secured. Every part of a free constitution hangs upon these two points; and these form the two capital features of the proposed Constitution of the United States. Without them, a volume of rights would avail nothing; and with them, a declaration of rights is absurd and unnecessary; for the people, where their liberties are committed to an equal representation and to a compound legislature

[433]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 54-55, 77.

> such as we observe in the new government, will always be the sovereigns of their rulers and hold all their rights in their own hands. To hold them at the mercy of their servants is disgraceful to the dignity of freemen. Men who call for a bill of rights have not recovered from the habits they acquired under the monarchical government of Great Britain.

"Trusting arbitrary power to any single body of men," Rush continued, was always dangerous, but the new government had no such power. The fact that legislative power was divided into three branches--the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the President--"will lead them to watch, to check, and to oppose each other should an attempt be made by either of them upon the liberties of the people."[434]

Though Rush told Jeremy Belknap that his letter to David Ramsay "contains my principles fairly stated," he gave them at the most conservative point in his political

[434]Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 453-454, 455 n. 1. "I consider it as an honor to the late convention," Rush declared to the Pennsylvania ratification convention, "that this system has not been disgraced with a bill of rights. Would it not be absurd to frame a formal declaration that our natural rights are required from ourselves. . . . In truth, then, there is no security but in a pure and adequate representation; the checks and all the other desiderata of government are nothing but political error without it, and with it, liberty can never be endangered" (John B. McMaster and Frederick D. Stone, Pennsylvania and the Federal Constitution, 1787-1788, Philadelphia, 1888, pp. 294-295, in Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia, 1934, pp. 78-79). "I assure you, sir," he wrote Adams in supporting his candidacy for Vice-President in the new government, "that friendship for you has had much less to do in this business . . . than a sincere desire to place a gentleman in the Vice-President's chair upon whose long-tried integrity, just principles in government, and firm opposition to popular arts and demagogues, such a dependence could be placed as shall secure us both from a convention and from alterations falsely and impudently called by some of our state governors amendments" (Adams, Jan. 22, 1789, Letters, I, 499).

development[435]--a fact which in part explains why his views on a bill of rights at this time differed so widely from his earlier ones. But we should note too that in 1777 he anticipated his position when he maintained the Pennsylvania Bill of Rights, however complete in enumerating the rights of mankind, failed to protect them because the Constitution lacked the proper representation and checks of a bicameral legislature. No bill of rights, he stressed, "can flourish long in the neighborhood of a single Assembly, and a Council of Censors possessing all the powers of the State. . . . These inestimable privileges in the Constitution of Pennsylvania resemble a tree loaded with the most luscious fruit, but surrounded by thorns, in such a manner, as to be for ever inaccessible to the hungry traveller."[436]

[435]Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 455 n. 1. In the letter Rush also emphasized that the people contained as much human depravity as rulers, excoriated a simple democracy as "the devil's own government," stressed the need for a lawful liberty, and praised the order, security for property, and protection against violence in the new government (Ibid., I, 454). At this time the Antifederalists considered Rush as the champion of the party of reaction. The anonymous author of The Government of Nature Delineated; or An Exact Picture of the New Constitution (Carlisle, 1788), p. 17 n., wrote: "Dr. Rush, in the state convention, amongst other wise and learned sayings, hath the following remarkable observation, 'I am happy sir, to find that the convention hath not disgraced this constitution with a bill of rights'--whether ought Pennsylvania to reward such declarations with a suit of tar and feathers, or with a hempen necklace" (Ibid., I, 455 n. 2).

[436]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 77-78. Boorstin, p. 194, suggests that "All the Jeffersonians were great believers in 'Bills of Rights,' and the word 'rights' is the most familiar and most significant word in their political idiom . . . . this emphasis. . . . revealed . . . the unsystematic and inarticulate character of Jeffersonian political theory. A list of 'rights' substituted for a

Concerning civil liberties, Rush commented in some detail on freedom of the press and the right to trial by jury. Though he supported freedom of the press, he felt newspapers frequently abused it. "The licentiousness of the press," he wrote in his essay on morals, "is a fruitful source of the corruption of morals." Since fear of detection and punishment often deterred men from injuring one another, the secrecy of a press, by removing both deterrents, propagated "revenge, scandal, and falsehood." In addition, personal slander, Rush argued, greatly damaged "the cause of liberty," for "who will believe a truth that is told of a bad man that has been accustomed to read falsehoods published every day of a good man?" Moreover, printers and readers of personal scandal "are accomplices in the guilt of the authors of it."[437]

In spite of the irresponsibility of the press, Rush saw reason for governmental control of it, but he advised Andrew Brown, in "Directions for Conducting a Newspaper. . .

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systematic theory of government." Considered by Boorstin to be a typical Jeffersonian, Rush nevertheless seems to be an exception in this instance, since he criticized efforts to add a bill of rights to the Federal Constitution and presented his political theories in some detail.

[437]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 463. "We read with horror the accounts of human depravity which has [sic] converted public executions into part of the amusements of several ancient and modern nations, but the depravity of the human heart is of the same nature in that man who can read with pleasure or even indifference the mangled character of a fellow citizen in a licentious newspaper" (Ibid.). Ironically, Rush's anonymous letter on inflation in 1779 provoked a debate in Congress over the liberty of the press because Elbridge Gerry found it "insulting to Congress" and "infamous" (John Dunlop, July 3, 1779, Letters, I, 236 n. 2).

to Make It Innocent, Useful, and Entertaining," never to allow his paper to become "a vehicle of private scandal or of personal disputes." An editor should expose the faults of public officers with decency, for "No man has a right to attack the vices or follies of private citizens in a newspaper." The right of freedom of the press, Rush concluded, was no license for malicious slander:

> Should you under a false idea of preserving the liberty of the press lay open the secrets of families and thereby wound female honor and delicacy, I hope our legislature will repeal the law that relates to assault and battery and that the liberty of the bludgeon will be as sacred and universal in Pennsylvania as your liberty of the press.[438]

The right of trial by jury, Rush believed, was an "inestimable" privilege.[439] Two provisions of the

[438]Brown, Oct. 1, 1788, Letters, I, 487. "The less you publish about yourself the better. What have your readers to do with the neglects or insults that are offered to you by your fellow citizens? If a printer offends you, attack him in your paper, because he can defend himself with the same weapons with which you wound him; type against type is fair play; but to attack a man who has no types nor printing press, or who does not know anything about the manual of using them, is cowardly in the highest degree. If you had been in twenty Bunkers-hill battles instead of one, and had fought forty duels into the bargain, and were afterwards to revenge an affront upon a man who was not a printer, in your newspaper, I would not believe that you possessed a particle of true courage. If such a person injures you, if you are a Christian, you may forgive him or sue him. If you are a savage, you may challenge him to fight a duel. And if you are a wild beast, you may tear him to pieces with your claws or kick him into the gutter" (Ibid., I, 488). A decade later, William Cobbett took just such advantage of Rush. See L. H. Butterfield, ed. "Appendix III: The Cobbett-Rush Feud," Letters, II, 1213-1218.

[439]"On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 17 n.

Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776, he observed, deprived citizens of trial by jury. First, the 22nd section empowered the general assembly to impeach any executive or judicial officer without trial by jury. Why, Rush asked, was this fundamental right denied? Secondly, the 47th section provided for a council of censors with absolute power for one year to censure violations of the Constitution; ". . . where is the man," he asked, "who can ensure himself a moment's safety from a body of men invested with absolute power for one whole year to censure and condemn, without judge or jury, every individual in the State?"[440]

Providing security for life, liberty, property, and equality, then, was the fundamental purpose of all political compacts, especially those of republican governments. Although governments might modify and restrain these

[440]"Observations," 1777, Selected Writings, pp. 73, 75. Rush also felt that impeachment proceedings after resignation or removal for maladministration should begin within a fixed time period. "A judicial or military officer," he reasoned, "may be innocent, and yet, from the delay of his trial for six or seven years, he may be deprived by death or other ways of the vouchers of his innocence. Woe to the man that ever holds one of the high offices of the State of Pennsylvania! He must ever, after his resignation, hold his life at the pleasure of the orator who rules the Assembly. The least mark of disrespect shown to him, or to any of the Assembly, rouses the Constitution and laws of his country against him; and perhaps, after an interval of twenty or thirty years conscious integrity, his grey hairs are dragged with sorrow to the grave. Let not this be thought to be too high a picture of this part of the Constitution of Pennsylvania. It is a picture of human nature in similar circumstances, in every age and country. Men possessed of unlimited and uncontrolled power are beasts of prey" (Ibid., p. 73).

natural and civil liberties for the general good of the community, they remained inherent rights that republican governments were constitutionally bound to safeguard. Thus any act of government which violated these rights ceased to be binding on the people--as set forth by the social contract theory. In 1810 a disillusioned Rush, concluding that the American government had largely failed in its charge to preserve natural rights, composed an epitaph on the liberties of the people:

> Here lie interred
> the liberties of the United States.
> They were purchased with much treasure and blood, and by uncommon exertions of talents and virtues. Their dissolution was brought on by the cheapness of suffrage in some of the states, by a funding system which begat banks and lotteries and land speculations, and by the removal of Congress to the city of Washington, a place so unfriendly to health, society, and instructing intercourse, and so calculated to foster party and malignant passions, that wise and good men considered a seat in it as a kind of banishment, in consequence of which the government fell into the hands of the young and ignorant and needy part of the community, and hence the loss of the respect and obedience due to laws, and hence one of the causes of the downfall of the last and only free country in the world.[441]

[441]Adams, Oct. 2, 1810, Letters, II, 1067-1068.

VIII. Conclusion: Rush's Political Pessimism

From 1790 onward, gloomy pessimism steadily tinged Rush's political thinking. "I perfectly accord with you," he wrote Adams in 1806,

> in your opinions respecting the tendency and issue of the present state of things in the world. Never perhaps was there a time in which there was more to fear from the wickedness and folly, and less to hope from the virtue and wisdom, of man. A newspaper, once the vehicle of pleasing and useful intelligence, is now the sad record only of misery and crimes. All systems of political order and happiness seem of late years to have disappointed their founders and advocates. Civilization, science, and commerce have long ago failed in their attempts to improve the condition of mankind, and even liberty itself, from which more was expected than from all other human means, has lately appeared to be insufficient for that purpose. If we fly from the lion of despotism, the bear of anarchy meets us, or if we retire from both and lean our hand upon the wall of our domestic sanctuary, the recollection of past or the dread of future evils bites us like a serpent.[442]

In contrast to Rush's optimism during the Revolution, after 1800 he considered political efforts to create order and stability in society as futile. As he told Adams, "Federalism! Democracy! law! order! 'Libertas et natale solum!' All fine, very fine words. I wonder, in the language of Dean Swift, 'where we stole them.'"[443]

[442]Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

[443]Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 955, 956 n. 14. The Latin quote means "Liberty and my native land."

Describing to Adams an allegorical dream in which Rush, on his way to a town meeting, was detained in what seemed to be a madhouse, but in reality was the town meeting he sought, Rush contended that such meetings were "an epitome of all public bodies, whether assembled in town meetings, state legislatures, congresses, conventions, or parliaments, and of all the statesmen and philosophers, whether at courts or in a closet, who expected to produce by their labors, wisdom, justice, order, and stability in human governments."[444] By 1812 Rush concluded that mundane political institutions were beyond perfection. "I have been educated," he wrote Adams, "in the unbelief . . . of the perfectibility of governments composed of imperfect materials. . . ."[445]

Vanity and disappointment, Rush believed, were the lot of every politician. "Do you not sometimes imprecate," he asked Adams,

> the same evils upon the day on which you became a politician that Job did upon the day of his birth? How many of us have reason to cry out in reviewing our Revolutionary services to our country with Caesar's parrot: "We have lost our labor!" . . . In looking back upon the years of our Revolution, I often wish for those ten thousand hours that I wasted in public pursuits and that I now see did no permanent work for my family nor my country. Such is the delight I now take in my professional

[444]Adams, Feb. 20, 1809, Letters, II, 995. Rush described the inmates of this "madhouse" with a Swiftian gusto. See Rush's account of another dream which compares lunatic patients with the House of Representatives in Washington, in Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1167.

[445]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171.

> studies that I daily regret that ever I was seduced from them for a moment to assist in an enterprise such as the late Catharine of Russia accomplished at Petersburgh, I mean building "a palace of ice." "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." "I came into the world crying; I lived complaining; and I died disappointed" should be inscribed upon the tombstone of every politician.[446]

Comparing his own political life to an attempt to "regulate the winds," he concluded that time spent in politics was largely wasted.[447] "Ah! Why did I ever suffer myself," he asked Adams, "to be withdrawn a moment from the noise of pestle and mortar to be thus distressed and disgusted with the impostures and frauds of public life?"[448]

The manifold evils of political life, Rush believed, offset what few benefits a public career offered. Governments that produced economic measures, such as funding systems, banks, and embargoes, generated greater vices than

[446]Adams, April 22, 1807, Letters, II, 941. "What an excellent sermon might be preached upon the text 'Men of high degree are a lie, and men of low degree are vanity'" (Adams, Nov. 21, 1805, Letters, II, 912).

[447]Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 985. "'What profit has the world or my country had from those things,' to use the words of an apostle, 'whereof I am now ashamed?' None, none, none" (Ibid.). Rush congratulated Jefferson upon his "escape from the high and dangerous appointment which your country (to use the words of Lord Chesterfield) inflicted upon you during the last eight years of your life. Methinks I see you renewing your acquaintance with your philosophical instruments and with the friends of your youth in your library, a place in which Voltaire has happily said 'every man's humor is subject to us,' and, of course, the reverse of a public situation in the world, 'in which we are subject to every man's humor'" (Jefferson, May 3, 1809, Letters, II, 1003).

[448]Adams, Nov. 21, 1805, Letters, II, 913.

the crime of war.[449] Corruption, thought Rush, bred politicians more greedy for power than even Aaron Burr.[450] "There is quackery," he contended, "in everything as well as in medicine, and it is because politicians neglect to form principles from facts that so many mistakes are committed in calculations upon the issue of commotions in human affairs."[451] But of the many evils of political life, he observed to Jefferson, none was "so great as the dissolution of friendships and the implacable hatreds which too often take their place."[452] "The experience I have had in public pursuits," he concluded, "has led me to make many discoveries in the human heart that are not very favorable to it. I shall leave some of them upon record by way of beacons to deter my children from engaging in public life."[453]

The development of the party system provided another source of political depravity, Rush felt. In 1798, he deplored "the politico-mania of the two great parties

[449]Adams, Mar. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 997-998.

[450]Adams, July 9, 1807, Letters, II, 951; "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 140.

[451]Adams, Sept. 21, 1805, Letters, II, 905.

[452]Jefferson, Feb. 1, 1811, Letters, II, 1078. Rush played the key role in reconciling Adams and Jefferson. See L. H. Butterfield, "The Dream of Benjamin Rush: The Reconciliation of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson," Yale Review, XL (1950-1951), 297-319.

[453]Adams, Feb. 12, 1790, Letters, I, 531.

which now divide our country."[454] Both extremes--Federalistic monarchists and Jacobinical democrats--were "contrary to truth and order. . . ."[455] "It would seem," he told Adams, "as if there was but two vices in the United States--and that is the vice of Federalism and the vice of Democracy."[456] In a letter to Adams in 1808, Rush reviewed the folly, madness, and corruption of political parties:

> Our papers teem with electioneering scandal. From all treason, sedition, conspiracies, and party rage, good Lord deliver us!--I have often heard when a boy of men's selling their souls to the Devil to relieve a pressing want of money. This practice is now in disuse, but we do the same thing in another way by selling our time, our talents, our tempers, our moral feelings and principles, and sometimes our wills, as well as our money, to a party. Under the constant pressure of the two powerful and opposite currents that divide our city, I am enabled to keep my feet. Sooner than float after either of them, I would quit my country and go where human folly and madness had exhausted themselves and where the extremity of despotism had left nothing to fear.[457]

[454]Ashton Alexander, Feb. 20, 1798, Letters, II, 797.

[455]John Montgomery, June 6, 1801, Letters, II, 834.

[456]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 994.

[457]Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 984. See also Julia Rush, Aug. 26, 1798, Letters, II, 803; William Marshall, Sept. 15, 1798, Letters, II, 807; Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 982-983; Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993-994. Rush ventured many opinions on the major parties from the Revolution to the War of 1812. See, for example, Adams, March 19, 1789, Letters, I, 506, 507; Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 900-901; Adams, Aug. 21, 1812, Letters, II, 1160, 1161. He frequently commented on the Whig and Tory parties during and after the Revolution. In Travels Through Life, he classified both according to motives and conduct. There were Tories who were motivated by 1) a desire for power and office, 2) an attachment to British commercial interest, 3) a belief in monarchy, 4) a belief in the Church of England hierarchy, and 5) a fear

Political life also exacted a personal price--abuse and slander. As Rush put it: "In battle men kill, without hating each other; in political contests men hate without killing, but in that hatred they commit murder every hour of their lives." "I feel pain in a review of my political life," he wrote in Travels Through Life,

> when I recollect the unfriendly influence which party spirit (the unavoidable concomitant of politicks [sic]) had upon my moral and social feelings, and the controversies and enmities to which it exposed me. In estimating the services of public

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of Presbyterianism. There were Whigs who were motivated by 1) a desire for power, 2) a hope that the war would cancel British debts, 3) an opportunity to pay debts with depreciated money, 4) a hatred of particular Tories, and 5) "a sincere and disinterested love to liberty and justice." According to conduct, Rush divided the Tories into four groups: 1) "furious Tories" who used violence to oppose the Whigs, 2) "Writing and talking Tories," 3) "Silent but busy Tories" who wrote pamphlets and circulated intelligence, 4) "Peaceable and conscientious Tories" who patiently submitted to the Whigs' power. Among the Whigs, there were 1) "Furious Whigs" who would rather tar and feather a Tory than defeat a British army, 2) "Speculating Whigs" who capitalized on the war to make large profits, 3) "Timid Whigs" whose hopes "rose and fell with every victory and defeat," and 4) "Staunch Whigs" who were "moderate in their tempers, but firm, inflexible, and persevering in their conduct" ("Travels Through Life," Autobiography, pp. 117-118). This last group of "whigs from love of liberty" had no lust for power, only a desire "to be governed well." The real danger to the country, Rush felt, came not from the Tories, but from the aristocratic, mercenary, and persecuting Whigs (Adams, Aug. 8, 1777, Letters, I, 152. See also Jonathan Bayard Smith?, April 20-21, 1778, Letters, I, 211; William Gordon, Dec. 10, 1778, Letters, I, 221, 222). Rush frequently noted that following the war, Tories gradually gained more economic and political power than the Whigs and eventually dominated the Federalist Party (Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 532; Adams, May 5, 1812, Letters, II, 1133; Adams, Aug. 21, 1812, Letters, II, 1161; Adams, Feb. 8, 1813, Letters, II, 1182).

> men, let public gratitude swell to its highest pitch. When the diminution or loss of benevolent feelings, and the pain of public slander and private disputes are mentioned, property, and even life itself are light as a feather when weighed in the opposite scale to them.[458]

Rush was keenly aware of the abuse politicians suffered at the hands of friends. One of the discoveries of public life, he maintained, was "that a 'politician can never suffer from his enemies.' The folly, the envy, and the ingratitude of his friends are the principal sources of his suffering."[459] Consequently, he entreated his sons "to take no public or active part in the disputes of their country beyond a vote at an election."[460] "The time, I

[458]"Travels Through Life," p. 162. Rush was convinced that his political activity prejudiced many against his medical theories. See Horatio Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 767; John Dickinson, Oct. 11, 1797, Letters, II, 793; Adams, Sept. 21, 1805, Letters, II, 906; John R. B. Rodgers, Oct. 16?, 1797, Letters, II, 794; Rodgers, Nov. 6, 1797, Letters, II, 795; "Travels Through Life," pp. 88-89. William Cobbett accused him of treason because he argued for the local origin of yellow fever (Noah Webster, June 20, 1799, Letters, II, 811). For a more positive opinion on the role of a physician in politics, see "The Vices and Virtues of Physicians," 1801, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), pp. 304-305.

[459]Adams, Feb. 12, 1790, Letters, I, 531. See also Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 533.

[460]"Travels Through Life," p. 162. "Among the fatherly cautions I deliver to them, none are repeated oftener than the dangers of public and the sin of party spirit" (Adams, Feb. 19, 1805, Letters, II, 891). When his son Richard was offered the position of comptroller of the United States Treasury in 1811, Rush tried to persuade him to refuse the post, but Richard took the position, to Rush's dismay, and went on to a distinguished career as cabinet member and diplomat. See "Commonplace Book, 1792-1813,"

fear, is past in our country," he concluded, "in which happiness or even usefulness is to be expected from public stations."[461]

Gradually, Rush found the fruits of the Revolution so bitter that he began to regret his part in it. Disillusioned by the government's ingratitude to Revolutionary patriots, he returned to the religiosity of his youth and placed his hopes solely in the Biblical promise of a millennium. As David Ramsay wrote in his Eulogium on Rush, "As he became less of a politician, he became more of a Christian."[462] "In reviewing the numerous instances of ingratitude of governments and nations to their benefactors," he told Adams, "I am often struck with the perfection of that divine government in which 'a cup of cold water' (the cheapest thing in the world), given under the influence of proper principles, 'shall not lose its reward.'"[463]

Whenever Rush viewed the 4th of July celebrations in Philadelphia, he was painfully reminded that the nation had lost sight of the true meaning of the struggle for

Autobiography, p. 298, Nov. 23, 1811; Corner, ed. "Appendix 3," Autobiography, p. 371; John H. Powell, Richard Rush, Republican Diplomat, 1780-1859 (Philadelphia, 1942).

[461]Jefferson, Aug. 29, 1804, Letters, II, 886.

[462]Butterfield, ed. "Introduction," Letters, I, lxxii; David Ramsay, An Eulogium upon Benjamin Rush (Philadelphia, 1813), p. 104.

[463]Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 902. See also "1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 216-217, March 20, 1792; Horatio Gates, Dec. 26, 1795, Letters, II, 767. For a satiric comment on the disregard of all Revolutionary patriots save Washington and Hamilton, see Adams, June 13, 1811, Letters, II, 1084.

independence. If the patriots of 1776 could view them, they would "recover the paleness of death in hearing the details of the degeneracy and depravity of the country for which they toiled or bled." With feelings of grief and indignation, they would "descend with haste and pleasure to their graves, now become agreeable and welcome to them" since they concealed "the base and inglorious conduct of some of their contemporaries and of all their posterity."[464] The 4th routinely celebrated, Rush observed, the glory of the military men--especially Washington--but "Scarcely a word was said of the solicitude and labors and fears and sorrows and sleepless nights of the men who projected, proposed, defended, and subscribed the Declaration of Independence."[465]

Rush reached the nadir of his political pessimism when, in a letter to Adams in 1808, he repudiated his role in the Revolution:

> O! had I but one ten thousand of those precious days which did not work for my family between the years 1774 and 1780, they should not be again employed in exposing the acts of British tyrants and American demagogues. I feel pain when I am reminded of my exertions in the cause of what we called liberty, and

[464]Adams, July 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1089-1090.

[465]Ibid. Many citizens, Rush wrote Adams, "are preparing to celebrate the praises (not of the men who subscribed the Declaration of Indpendence with ropes round their necks) but of General Washington and Colonel Hamilton on that memorable day" (Adams, June 13, 1811, Letters, II, 1084).

> sometimes wish I could erase my name from the Declaration of Independence. In case of a rupture with Britain or France, which shall we fight for? For our Constitution? I cannot meet with a man who loves it. It is considered as too weak by one half of our citizens and too strong by the other half. Shall we rally round the standard of a popular chief? Since the death of Washington there has been no such center of Union. Shall we contend for our paternal acres and dwelling houses? Alas! how few of these are owned by the men who will in case of a war be called to the helm of our government. Their property consists chiefly in bank stock, and that to such an extent that among some of them it is considered as a mark of bad calculation for a man to live in a house of his own.[466]

But Adams, who understood perfectly the basis for Rush's disillusion, refused to let Rush repudiate his significant public services and in his reply, June 20, 1808, sharply rebuked Rush for his complaint:

> Now sir, for your Groans. You and I in the Revolution acted from Principle; we did our Duty, as we then believed, according to our best Information, Judgment and Consciences. Shall we now repent of this? God forbid! No! If a banishment to Cayenne, or to Bottany Bay or even the Guillotine were to be the necessary Consequences of it to us, we ought not to repent. Repent? This is impossible: how can a Man repent of his virtues? Repent of your sins, and Crimes and willfull Follies, if you can recollect any: but never repent of your Charities, of your Benevolences, of your Cures in the Yellow Fever, no, nor of the innumerable hazards of your Life you have run, in the prosecution of your duty.[467]

[466]Adams, June 13, 1808, Letters, II, 966.

[467]Butterfield, ed. "Introduction," Letters, I, lxxii-lxxiii; Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle. Series A (Philadelphia, 1892), p. 184.

Sustained in his faith in republicanism by Adams, Rush proposed to his friend in 1811 that he prepare "a posthumous address to the citizens of the United States, in which shall be inculcated all those great national, social domestic, and religious virtues which alone can make a people free, great, and happy." The address, Rush suggested, would declare these virtues "indispensably necessary to the existence of a REPUBLIC."[468] Thus his belief in a republican form of government survived--somewhat shakily to be sure--the pessimism of his last years.

When Rush reviewed his political career in 1800, in spite of the pain he felt, he recalled with pleasure "the integrity of all my public pursuits." His review stands as his final estimate of the Revolutionary cause:

> I was animated constantly by a belief that I was acting for the benefit of the whole world, and of future ages, by assisting in the formation of a new means of political order and general happiness. Whether my belief as far as it relates to the last great object will be realized, or not, is yet a secret in the womb of time. Late events have at times induced me to believe my hopes were visionary and my labors lost, and with them the more valuable labors of all the patriots and the blood of all the heroes of the Revolution. At other times I have consoled myself by recollecting that the seeds of all the great changes for the better in the condition of mankind, have been sowed years and centuries before they came to pass. I still believe the American Revolution to be big with important consequences to the world, and that the labor of no individual, however feeble his contributions to it were, could have been spared. It

[468]Butterfield, ed. "Introduction," Letters, I, lxxiii; Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096.

was often said by the philanthropic Dr. Jebb "that no good effort was lost." Still less can it be true, that the American Revolution will be an abortive event in the divine government of the world.[469]

[469]"Travels Through Life," pp. 161-162. The Dr. Jebb Rush refers to is probably John Jebb, M. D., 1736-1786, theologian, political writer and physician, active in prison reform (Ibid.). See Rush's similar statement in Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 985.

CHAPTER II: BENJAMIN RUSH'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

I. Introduction

Metaphysics, as Rush defined it, was "the study of the anatomy . . . of the human mind"; it was "a simple history of the faculties of the mind and operations of the mind. . . ."[1] "An accurate knowledge of the faculties of the mind, and of their various modes of combination and action," Rush maintained, was necessary to ascertain "the reciprocal influence of the body and mind upon each other."[2]

Two aspects of Rush's definition require comment here. The first thing we should note is how much science has entered into his philosophical thinking--a development that A. N. Whitehead attributed to the pervasive influence of "scientific materialism" in the 17th and 18th centuries.[3]

[1]"Duties of a Physician," 1789, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 318; "The Progress of Medicine," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 227. In Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 102, 271-272, Rush designated "the anatomy of the human mind" or "phrenology" as a substitute for metaphysics (Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, New York, 1948, pp. 119, 271 n. 9; I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII, 1907, 95).

[2]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 318.

[3]"There persists," Whitehead observed, ". . . throughout the whole period [the last three centuries] the fixed scientific cosmology which presupposes the ultimate fact of an irreducible brute matter, or material, spread throughout space in a flux of configurations. In itself such a material is senseless, valueless, purposeless. It just does what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by

When Rush defined philosophy as a study of the anatomy of the mind, he virtually included metaphysics as a branch of natural history. By utilizing the methodology and laws of anatomy and physiology to explain human thought, he hoped to create a "mental science" that would be "perfected by the aid and discoveries of medicine."[4] A physiology of the mind, as the title to lecture iv of Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811) suggested, would demonstrate "the influence of physical causes, in promoting the strength and activity of the intellectual faculties of man"[5]; it would render the science of mind an exact science, not a chimerical and uncertain thing.

> While it bore the name of metaphysics, and consisted only of words without ideas, of definitions of nonentities, and of controversies about the ubiquity . . . of spirit and space, it deserved no quarter from the rational part of mankind; but the science, I am now speaking of, is as real as any of the sciences that treat upon matter, and more certain and perfect than most of them.[6]

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external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being. It is this assumption that I call 'scientific materialism.' . . . The success of the scheme has adversely affected the various currents of European thought. The historical revolt was anti-rationalistic, because the rationalism of the scholastics required a sharp correction by contact with brute fact. But the revival of philosophy in the hands of Descartes and his successors was entirely coloured in its development by the acceptance of the scientific cosmology at its face value" (A. N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, New York, 1925, pp. 18-19).

[4]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 318.

[5]Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 271 n. 9.

[6]"On the Utility of a Knowledge of the Faculties and Operations of the Mind to a Physician," 1805, Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 271; Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 95.

What this ultimately meant, of course, was a philosophy of materialism, of the materiality of thought. It was because physicians had refrained, he concluded, from investigating such subjects as morals, metaphysics, and theology "that physiology has so long been an obscure, and conjectural science."[7]

The second aspect of Rush's scientific approach to metaphysics is what Whitehead has called the anti-intellectual, anti-rationalistic character of the scientific revolution in that it returned to "the contemplation of brute fact" and it recoiled from "the inflexible rationality of medieval thought."[8] Rush was convinced that physicians must "assert their prerogative, and . . . rescue the mental science from the usurpations of schoolmen and divines."[9] Only then could philosophy assume the necessary simplicity, "unconnected with the ancient nomenclature of words, and phrases, which once constituted the science of metaphysics."[10]

[7]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 135. Daniel J. Boorstin, pp. 111-166, frequently uses Rush to document the Jeffersonian physiology of thought and morals.

[8]Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 9. "Science has never shaken off the impress of its origin in the historical revolt of the later Renaissance. It has remained predominantly an anti-rationalistic movement, based upon a naive faith. What reasoning it has wanted, has been borrowed from mathematics which is a surviving relic of Greek rationalism, following the deductive method. Science repudiates philosophy. In other words, it has never cared to justify its faith or to explain its meanings; and has remained blandly indifferent to its refutation by Hume" (Ibid., p. 17).

[9]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 318.

[10]"Progress," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 227.

In his lecture on the physician's duties in 1789, he recommended certain authors on metaphysics because they had "cleared this sublime science of its technical rubbish, and rendered it both intelligible and useful."[11]

Although Rush eschewed the intricate and subtle a priori reasoning of Scholastic philosophy, he did not always adhere strictly to a naturalistic, scientific approach in his philosophical inquiries. For example, in the last decade or so of his life, he increasingly exhibited attitudes strikingly similar to Jonathan Swift's skeptical and fideistic beliefs--ironical enough in view of Rush's open hostility to Hume's skeptical rejection of religion, and his own philosophical materialism.[12] Moreover, under the influence of Scottish common sense realism, Rush contradicted his materialistic rejection of innate ideas by speculating on the existence of a moral faculty and by occasionally hinting of a belief in a kind of intuitional mental faculty. In addition, aspects of his deep religious faith clashed with his materialism, even though he frequently

[11]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 318.

[12]For Swift's skepticism, see John A. Yunck, "The Skeptical Faith of Jonathan Swift," The Personalist, XLII (Autumn, 1961), 533-554. For an authoritative discussion of philosophical skepticism and fideism, see Louis I. Bredvold's The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden (Ann Arbor, 1934), which traces the development of skepticism from Greek origins to the 17th century. I hope to show a number of similarities between Swift's fideistic skepticism, as discussed by Professor Yunck, and Rush's views.

argued for their compatibility.[13] Thus he offset, for example, the deterministic implications of his monistic materialism with the theological dualism of liberty and necessity. These examples suggest that no one system confined Rush's philosophical speculations, that he did not completely fill the mold of a Jeffersonian materialist, and that his scientific and religious views ultimately failed to coalesce into a unified system of thought.[14]

We shall consider these exceptions at some length in this chapter, but we must not forget that materialism was the main tendency of Rush's philosophical thought. Consequently, we shall devote much of the chapter to Rush's natural history of thought and morality--his analysis of empiricism, associationism, and thought as material as well as his "anatomy" of such powers of the mind as reason, will, imagination, and the moral sense.

The five authors Rush recommended on metaphysics--John Locke, David Hartley, Thomas Reid, James Beattie, and Joseph Butler--were, to a large extent, the shaping forces of his own philosophy.[15] He derived his empiricism largely from Locke, "that justly celebrated oracle," whose "eagle eye of genius," in the Essay Concerning Human

[14]Although Boorstin rightfully places Rush in the Jeffersonian circle, I shall attempt to show that on several points in philosophy, and even more so in religion, Rush and Jefferson differed considerably.

[15]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 318.

Understanding (1690), "first unfolded to us a map of the intellectual world."[16] Hartley's Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (1749), Rush's favorite philosophical work, furnished him with the principle of associationism and the relationship between psychology and physiology.[17] Dr. Hartley's "discoveries in physiological, metaphysical, and theological science," he concluded, "mark an era in the achievements of the human mind"; his works "will probably perish, only with time itself. . . ."[18]

Thomas Reid and James Beattie, proponents of the Scots philosophy of "common sense," not only influenced Rush's thinking on the moral faculty, but impressed him with their refutation of Hume's skepticism.[19] Bishop Joseph Butler's

[16]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 189.

[17]Letters, II, 780 n. 4. In his autobiography, he wrote that from none of the books he read to prepare lectures "did I derive so many useful hints as from Dr. Hartley's treatise upon the frame of man" ("Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner, Princeton, 1948, p. 94). Rush wrote James Currie in 1796 of "having long been a disciple of Dr. Hartley" (Currie, July 26, 1796, Letters, II, 780), and Adams in 1807 of "the great and good, I had almost said the inspired, Dr. Hartley" (Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 953).

[18]Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 953; "The Vices and Virtues of Physicians," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 199.

[19]Rush's great admiration for Beattie's philosophical writings led him to procure Beattie's membership in the American Philosophical Society. In a letter to Beattie in 1786, he thanked him for "the knowledge and pleasure" he had gained "from your excellent writings. . ." (Beattie, Aug. 1, 1786, Letters, II, 394). "I cannot think of him," he wrote James Kidd in 1794, "without fancying that I see Mr. Hume prostrate at his feet. He was the David who slew that giant of infidelity" (Kidd, May 13, 1794, Letters, II, 748). See also Kidd, Nov. 25, 1793, Letters, II, 746-747.

works, particularly The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed (1736), undoubtedly attracted Rush because they attacked deism, defended revealed religion, and demonstrated, in rationalistic terms, the existence of the deity.[20] In fact, all of these philosophers appealed to him because their speculations remained within the framework of orthodox Protestantism. This was the reason, for example, Rush was so devoted to Hartley's Observations on Man:

> I envy the age in which that book will be relished and believed, for it has unfortunately appeared a century or two before the world is prepared for it. The Scotch philosophers of whom Dugald Stewart has lately become the champion abuse it in intemperate terms, but it is because they are so bewildered in the pagan doctrines of Aristotle and Plato that they do not understand it. Its illustrious author has established an indissoluble union between physiology, metaphysics, and Christianity. He has so disposed them that they mutually afford not only support but beauty and splendor to each other.[21]

"Beattie on Truth" is the spine title of one of the books in Charles Willson Peale's portrait of Rush (Letters, II, 394 n. 1). The most authoritative study of Scottish "common sense" is James McCosh, The Scottish Philosophy (New York, 1875). Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), pp. 33-36, summarizes the significant influence of this philosophy on American thought in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

[20]Rush informed Adams that "I possess Butler's Sermons, also his Analogy, and have read them over and over and marked and selected passages from each of them. They are monuments of the strength of the human understanding. I feel in reading them as if I were in company with a visitor from another planet, alike elevated above ours in size and in the intellect of its inhabitants" (Adams, Aug. 8, 1812, Letters, II, 1157).

[21]Jefferson, Jan. 2, 1811, Letters, II, 1075. "Next to my Bible I find the most satisfaction in reading the works of Dr. Hartley upon both doctrinal and practical

subjects. His morality is truly evangelical. His posthumous letters to his sister show him to have been a saint of the first order" (Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1035). See also "Vices and Virtues," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 299. These authors were standard fare in required courses in Moral Philosophy or Metaphysics offered at most American colleges during the 18th century (Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, p. 36).

II. The Empirical Foundations of Rush's Philosophy

> "But, Mr. President, in thus rejecting the empire of Reason in government, permit me to mention an empire of another kind, to which men everywhere yield a willing, and in some instances involuntary, submission, and that is the EMPIRE OF HABIT. You might as well arrest the orbs of heaven in their course as suddenly change the habits of a whole people. Even in little things they resist sudden innovations upon their ancient and general customs. Peter, the husband of the late Catharine of Russia, lost his life for an attempt to change a part of the dress of his subjects. The inhabitants of Madrid once rose in a mob to oppose an edict which was intended to compel them to use privies in order to prevent the accumulation of night soil in their streets. An hundred other instances might be mentioned of the fatal or mischievous consequences of opposing the settled habits and prejudices of nations and communities."[22]

Thus, in an allegorical dream that Rush recounted to Adams, the speaker rebuffed Rush who, as an imaginary President bent on temperance reform, had defended reason. Satirically Rush was demonstrating how much man--often involuntarily--was a creature of his environment.[23] Earlier, a more optimistic Rush had hoped Americans might utilize the Lockean doctrine of environmental conditioning

[22]Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 978-979.

[23]"We suffer so much from traditional error of various kinds, in education, morals, and government, that I have been led to wish, that it were possible for us to have schools established, in the United States, for teaching the art of forgetting. I think three-fourths of all our school-masters, divines, and legislators would profit very much, by spending two or three years in such useful institutions" ("The Amusements and Punishments which are Proper for Schools," 1790, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, New York, 1947, p. 115).

to great advantage in the new nation. "Remember," he observed in 1789, ". . . that we are at present in a forming state. We have as yet but few habits of any kind, and good ones may be acquired and fixed by a good example and proper instruction as easily as bad ones without the benefit of either."[24]

Whether disparaging reason, announcing America's future greatness, or attributing the Indian's inferiority to the effect of environment,[25] Rush repeatedly drew upon Lockean empiricism in his correspondence and publications. He readily thought in patterns that assumed the principles of sensationalism and association. It was obvious when he recommended vocal music because of "its mechanical effects in civilizing the mind, and thereby preparing it for the influence of religion and government."[26] It was obvious when, in his plan for a peace office, he sought "to affect the minds of the citizens of the United States with the blessings of peace, by contrasting them with the evils of war," vividly illustrated in lurid paintings.[27] It was obvious when he suggested that rather than "inspire our

[24]John Howard, Oct. 14, 1789, Letters, I, 528.

[25]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), p. 101. See "Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 254-292 passim.

[26]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92.

[27]"A Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 22-23.

youth," by exercises in firearms, "with hostile ideas towards their fellow creatures," we should "instill into their minds sentiments of universal benevolence to men of all nations and colours."[28] It was obvious when he observed that since greater or lesser degrees of harmony analogous to the vibrations of musical sound produced the pleasures of the senses, "our bodies may be compared to a violin; the senses are its strings; every thing beautiful and sublime in nature and art is its bow; the Creator is the hand that moves it; and pleasure, nearly constant pleasure, their necessary effect."[29] But this is not to say that Rush never qualified his empirical beliefs. On the contrary, as we shall see, he was dissatisfied with several aspects of Lockean epistemology. First, however, we should consider his views on sensational psychology, and their implications for his thinking on education, politics, economics, and morality.

Rush emphasized four aspects of empiricism in his writings--the theory that knowledge was acquired through the senses, the rejection therefore of non-empirical knowledge, the influence of physical stimuli upon human conduct, and the impressionability of early life. The doctrine that life resulted from physical stimuli acting upon the body, Rush

[28]"Amusements," 1790, Selected Writings, p. 108.

[29]"Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), pp. 424-425; I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 96.

asserted in his Lectures on Animal Life, "enables us to reject the doctrine of innate ideas, and to ascribe all our knowledge of sensible objects to impressions acting upon an innate capacity to receive ideas."[30] The mind at birth, then, was "a perfect blank."[31] "Were it possible," he reasoned, "for a child to grow up to manhood without the use of any of its senses, it would not possess a single idea of a material object; and as all human knowledge is compounded of simple ideas, this person would be as destitute of knowledge of every kind, as the grossest portion of vegetable, or fossil matter."[32] The fact people remembered forgotten incidents in dreams, he told his medical students, did not prove that they were preternatural occurrences, but simply that nothing existed in the brain which had not previously entered through the senses.[33]

Rush believed the "great principles in human conduct" were sensibility, habit, imitation and association. "The influence of these physical causes," he observed, was "powerful upon the intellects, as well as upon the principles and morals of young people."[34] These ideas led Rush to

[30]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 177.

[31]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 89.

[32]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 177-178.

[33]Notes of Rush's Lectures taken by [John?] Purnell (Medical and Chirurgical Faculty Library, Baltimore, p. 128--hereafter cited as Purnell MS., in Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 99.

[34]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92.

conclude that the mind in childhood and youth, still in the forming state, was the most susceptible to facts and principles. "The human mind runs as naturally into principles as it does after facts. It submits with difficulty to those restraints or partial discoveries which are imposed upon it in the infancy of reason."[35] Since the memory was the first faculty to function in children's minds, it was necessary, Rush felt, "to impress it" with true prejudices before false ones took hold. Derived from the impressions made upon the mind in early life, true or false beliefs were fixed in the mind by habit, "a general law in our natures" that made beliefs "easy, strong and agreeable by repetition."[36]

Rush's theory of empirical knowledge had rather obvious implications for education. Since knowledge came from observation, reading, and reflection, he frequently warned his students against a priori theories not based on empirical

[35] Ibid., p. 89.

[36] "The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 117-118. See also "Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, pp. 87, 93. If memory was the first mental faculty to function, it was also the least reliable and the first to decay in old age ("Observations and Reasoning in Medicine," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 245; "On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 349). On the connection between memory and reminiscence, and recovery of forgotten knowledge in old age, see "On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 347; "The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 120. The understanding was superior to memory, Rush felt, because knowledge was conveyed to the understanding, only words into the memory ("The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 129).

data.[37] He urged them to imitate their predecessors by developing "a spirit of inquiry, and a disposition to controvert old and doubtful opinions, by the test of experiments. . . . Think, read, and observe. Observe, read, and think, for yourselves."[38] As a method of acquiring knowledge, he constantly recommended keeping notebooks that recorded observations, conversations, notes from readings and lectures.[39]

Further, educational methods, Rush believed, must utilize sensationalist psychology, for repetition of sensory experience tended to fix knowledge in the mind. When using school books such as the Bible, teachers, he urged, should "insensibly engrave" their contents upon children's minds, because children, "instructed in this way," seldom forgot what they learned.[40] Education must bring all of the child's senses into play. "It is a law

[37]Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 40.

[38]"The Progress of Medicine," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 244. "Observe, read, think, record, converse, and compose," he advised his son James (James Rush, Sept. 4, 1809, Letters, II, 1018). See also "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 87; Julia Rush, Oct. 9-10, 1793, Letters, II, 710.

[39]Rush discussed his own practice of keeping commonplace books in Travels Through Life (Autobiography, pp. 92-93). He often advised his sons to keep journals. See "Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 280-281, June 1809; John Rush, May 18, 1796, Letters, II, 776; James Rush, Dec. 22, 1809, Letters, II, 1029-1030; James Rush, Feb. 7, 1810, Letters, II, 1037; James Rush, Oct. 4, 1810, Letters, II, 1069.

[40]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 126.

in our natures;". Rush maintained, "that we remember longest the knowledge we acquire by the greatest number of our senses."[41]

In addition, teachers, Rush thought, should prefer factual knowledge of material objects to abstractions. One of the reasons he wanted to eliminate teaching dead languages was to allow more study of "the useful arts and sciences." The time saved "might be employed in communicating the knowledge of things instead of the sounds and relations of words." "The human intellects," he concluded, "are brutalized by being stuffed in early life with such offal learning."[42] Classical languages were also antithetical to factual, empirical knowledge because they made "the first knowledge of boys to consist in fables," and thus led them "to reject truth, or to esteem it no more than the gross errors and fictions of the ancient poets."[43] Rush clearly saw, long before John Dewey, that education was the

[41]Ibid., p. 119.

[42]Adams, Feb. 4, 1811, Letters, II, 1080-1081. "In no one of the acts of man do we behold more weakness and error, than in our present modes of education. We teach our sons words, at the expense of things. We teach them what was done two thousand years ago, and conceal from them what is doing every day" ("Progress," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 236).

[43]Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 535. Rush repeatedly took this stand against Greek and Latin and wrote "An Enquiry into the Utility of Latin and Greek Languages . . ." American Museum, V (June 1789), 525-535, reprinted with the title altered in Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical (Philadelphia, 1798), pp. 21-56. See "1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 345-347, c. 1809, for Rush's notes on the subject. See also James Muir, Aug. 24, 1791, Letters, I, 604-607.

chief instrument for reform, for creating in the new nation a social environment compatible with republicanism as well as with the orderly universe. Education must "convert men into republican machines," he contended, ". . . if we expect them to perform their parts properly, in the great machine of the government of the state"; it must fit "the wills of the people" to each other in order "to produce regularity and unison in government."[44]

Rush utilized Lockean environmentalism in political and economic theory too. Traditional political institutions exerted great influence upon the people. "It will require half a century," Rush lamented, "to cure us of all our monarchical habits and prejudices."[45] And "cure" was the mot juste, for monarchy was "a leprosy of the mind," which required ages to wear away.[46] He knew that men "depraved by false government" continued to prefer monarchy.[47] Rush especially criticized monarchy and aristocracy because

[44]"Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 92. Teachers and mothers "plant the seeds of nearly all the good and evil which exist in the world. The reformation must therefore be begun in nurseries and in schools. If the habits we acquire there, were to have no influence upon our future happiness, yet the influence they have upon our governments, is a sufficient reason why we ought to introduce new modes . . . of education in our country" ("Amusements," 1790, Selected Writings, p. 114).

[45]Horatio Gates, Sept. 5, 1781, Letters, I, 265.

[46]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 193, June 10, 1791.

[47]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 826.

"they corrupt all the powers of the mind"--the understanding with false ideas of divine right and passive obedience; the affections with misplaced love of kings and nobles; manners with despotism in the home and school; and morals with servility, idleness, vice of every description.[48] Nevertheless, the beneficial environment of republicanism, Rush was convinced, would "in time beget republican opinions and manners."[49] But its greatest effect--from the viewpoint of a physiology of thought--was to promote the mental, and indirectly the bodily, health of the species. As he wrote in his journal, "Elections shake the public mind, improve the understanding, from influence of Passions on the understanding, promote longevity."[50]

It is not surprising that Rush advanced agriculture as the proper environment for mankind. Again it was primarily a matter of health. If Southern slaveholders, he observed, "cultivated their lands with their own hands, . . . they would enjoy more health and happiness in a competency acquired without violating the laws of nature and religion."[51] He emphasized that agriculture "employs the body in a manner the most conducive to its health.--It

[48]"1789-1791," Autobiography, pp. 197-198, June 10, 1791.

[49]Gates, Sept. 5, 1781, Letters, I, 265.

[50]"1789-1791," p. 199, June 10, 1791.

[51]"On the Different Species of Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 212.

preserves and increases the species most."[52] Where agriculture was "the true basis of national health, riches and populousness," a manufacturing, urban environment stood for disease and poverty. He warned against admitting unhealthy manufactures into America, noting that they frequently brought diseases with them.[53] The refinements of polished life, according to Rush, increased the number and severity of vices.[54] During his travels in France in 1769, he noted the poverty that attended the neglect of agriculture.[55] An agrarian environment, then, produced the best conditions for the physical and mental health of the individual.

Rush was deeply concerned about the relationship between environment--both physical and social--and morality. In examining the influence of educational, political, and economic institutions on the mind, Rush noted how they affected conduct as well. "Man is a compound of good and evil," he wrote. "These dispositions appear in different proportions, according to the circumstances in which he is placed. They are much influenced by different states of society, and by different pursuits and occupations in

[52]"Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, p. 358.

[53]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 289-290.

[54]Ibid., p. 272.

[55]"On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, pp. 391-392.

life."[56]

Although, as Boorstin says, Rush's theory that the physical environment influenced morality, to a large extent, added up to a physiology of morals, rather than a system of ethics,[57] nevertheless his strong religious bent led him finally to prefer religious, to environmental, causes for moral conduct. The paradox of Rush's thinking on morality--the fact he based it on scientific grounds as well as on religious grounds--illustrates the fundamental conflict between science and religion in his thought.

On the one hand, it was true that Rush, in an Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty (1786), maintained that environmental causes decisively influenced ethical behavior.[58] In this essay, he demonstrated the relation between moral health and social well-being. As a natural history of morals, it was a

[56]"The Vices and Virtues of Physicians," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 293. Rush went on to elaborate on the vices and virtues peculiar to the medical profession (Ibid., pp. 293-307).

[57]Boorstin, pp. 145-146. "The Jeffersonians were more interested in the processes of moral behavior than in the content of a moral law. They labored not toward perfecting the commandments but toward explaining the connection between a healthy moral sense and the well-being of the species. They produced not a decalogue but a vade mecum--a guide to moral health. . . . Without metaphysical speculation on whether or why men should be sensitive, pious, honest and sober, the Jeffersonian had thus immersed himself directly in the practical tasks of making men aware of the sufferings of their neighbors, and punishing them effectively for drunkenness and theft. Untroubled himself by the ultimate questions of ethics, he preferred to advance the physiology of morals" (Ibid.).

[58]Selected Writings, pp. 181-211. See also Rush's Diseases of the Mind (Philadelphia, 1812), especially chapters x, xvii, xviii, and xix; Adams, Nov. 25, 1806, Letters, II, 934-935, 936 n. 1.

clinical examination of the influence of physical causes on moral conduct; it was not a metaphysical inquiry into the origin or nature of good and evil. It viewed morality as a process culminating in actions that affected society--as Rush put it,

> As I consider virtue and vice to consist in action, and not in opinion, and as this action has its seat in the will, and not in the conscience, I shall confine my inquiries chiefly to the influence of physical causes upon that moral power of the mind [the moral faculty], which is connected with volition, although many of these causes act likewise upon the conscience. . . . The state of the moral faculty is visible in actions, which affect the well-being of society. The state of the conscience is invisible, and therefore removed beyond our investigation.[59]

It is not surprising, then, that this physiological approach to morality led Rush to view action itself as beneficial to the "health" of the moral sense. "Idleness," he stressed, "is the parent of every vice," and to illustrate his point, he noted that the Old Testament emphasized it as a leading cause of vice in the Cities of the Plain. Labor, therefore, "favors and facilitates the practice of virtue." Farming was a happy occupation "because its laborious employments are favourable to virtue, and unfriendly to vice"; workhouses were the "most benevolent of all punishments" because labor was the "most suitable means of reformation."[60] Rush explained this relationship between

[59]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 182.

[60]Ibid., pp. 195-196.

activity and moral health in his Diseases of the Mind:

> Is debility the predisposing cause of disease in the body? so it is of vice in the mind. This debility in the mind consists in indolence, or a want of occupation. Bunyan has justly said, in support of this remark, that "an idle man's brain is the devil's work shop." The young woman, whose moral derangement I mentioned a little while ago, was always inoffensive when she was busy. The employment contrived for her by her parents was, to mix two or three papers of pins of different sizes together, and afterwards, to oblige her to separate, and sort them. The near relation of debility and vice has been expressed by the schoolmen in the following words "non posse, est malum posse." To do nothing, is generally to do evil.[61]

Thus Rush justified, in physiological terms, the traditional Puritan scruple at waste and idleness.

This physiological approach was also evident, in his analysis of the moral faculty, when he added two new diseases to nosology--nicronomia, "the partial or weakened action of the moral faculty," and anomia, "the total absence of this faculty."[62] Rush treated vice here as a diseased state of the moral faculty; it was no longer a question of sin. What was needed was medical treatment, not moral lectures. In contrast, Rush used the term "sensibility" to designate the healthy condition of the moral sense. Anything that dulled moral sensibility injured morals. For example, the exposure of the Romans to scenes of violence between gladiators and wild animals blunted their moral

[61] Diseases of the Mind (1812), pp. 360-361; Boorstin, p. 148, 276 n. 38.

[62] "Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 192.

sensitivity--a fact which accounted for their notorious immorality. Cruelty to animals, public punishments, and public accounts of crimes, by lessening through repetition the horror they usually excited, likewise gradually dulled moral sensibility. "To keep sensibility alive" by the "mechanical method" of "a familiarity with scenes of distress from poverty and disease" promoted morality, for "compassion never awakens in the human bosom, without being accompanied by a train of sister virtues."[63]

Rush's attitude toward moral education--that it was a mechanical training or exercising of the moral faculty--also demonstrates his practical, secular approach. In the essay on the moral faculty, he called for the creation of a "moral science" to eliminate "baneful vices." If the condition of those parts of the human body connected with the human soul influenced morals, then what was needed was experimentation and a recognition that "a physical regimen should as necessarily accompany a moral precept, as directions with respect to the air--exercise--and diet, generally accompany prescription for the consumption and the gout." No longer was morality the exclusive business of parents, teachers, and divines; it was equally the

[63]Ibid., pp. 205-206; Boorstin, pp. 144-145. ". . . corporal punishments, inflicted at school, have a tendency to destroy the sense of shame, and thereby to destroy all moral sensibility" ("Amusements," 1790, Selected Writings, p. 111). See also Ibid., p. 110; Ashbel Green, Dec. 31, 1812, Letters, II, 1174.

responsibility of legislators, natural philosophers, and physicians.[64]

At this point in his career, then, Rush expressed a hope (one that finally faded) that man could approach moral perfection through a "moral science":

> Should the same industry and ingenuity, which have produced . . . triumphs of medicine over diseases and death, be applied to the moral science, it is highly probable, that most of those baneful vices, which deform the human breast, and convulse the nations of the earth, might be banished from the world. I am not so sanguine as to suppose, that it is possible for man to acquire so much perfection from science, religion, liberty and good government, as to cease to be mortal; but I am fully persuaded, that from the combined action of causes, which operate at once upon the reason, the moral faculty, the passions, the senses, the brain, the nerves, the blood and the heart, it is possible to produce such a change in his moral character, as shall raise him to a resemblance of angels--nay more, to the likeness of GOD himself.[65]

The height of Rush's effort to create a "science of morals" came in his utopian proposal in 1788 to establish a federal council on morals, patterned after the new Federal Constitution. Contained in a public letter, addressed "To the Ministers of the Gospel of All Denominations," Rush's plan would advance the Kingdom of God by "natural means."[66]

> By means of such an institution Christian charity will be promoted, and the discipline

[64] Ibid., pp. 202, 208-209.

[65] Ibid., p. 209.

[66] "To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 461-467.

> of each church will be strengthened--for I would propose that a dismission for immorality from any one church should exclude a man from every church in the ecclesiastical union. But the advantages of this Christian convention will not end here. It will possess an influence over the laws of the United States. This influence will differ from that of most of the ecclesiastical associations that have existed in the world. It will be the influence of reason over the passions of men. Its objects will be morals, not principles, and the design of it will be, not to make men zealous members of any one church, but to make them good neighbors, good husbands, good fathers, good masters, good servants, and of course good rulers and good citizens. The plan is certainly a practical one. America has taught the nations of Europe by her example to be free, and it is to be hoped she will soon teach them to govern themselves. Let her advance one step further--and teach mankind that it is possible for Christians of different denominations to love each other and to unite in the advancement of their common interests. By the gradual operation of such natural means, the kingdoms of this world are probably to become the kingdoms of the Prince of Righteousness and Peace.[67]

But on the other hand, it was also true that Rush was "not one of those modern philosophers, who derive the vices of mankind from the influence of civilization." Though "their number and malignity" increased with the refinements of civilization, they were not solely the result of environment--they were the result of man's innate human depravity, the consequence of original sin.[68] It was absurd, he told

[67] Ibid., I, 466-467. His optimism over the prospect of legislating morality quickly faded, however. Three years later he pointed out "the insufficiency of the law, to produce moral virtue" while stressing the necessity of Christ's gospel as "the best rule of life, and the surest guide to happiness" ("The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 129).

[68] "Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 272.

Adams in 1801, to derive human depravity

> from any other source than that recorded in the Bible. It has been ascribed not only to commoners, but to kings, to different forms of government, to the clergy, and by Ruisseau [sic] and some members of the legislature of Pennsylvania to science and to colleges. Legislation founded upon any one of these opinions must necessarily be erroneous and productive of misery. In the Bible alone man is described as he is. He can be governed of course only by accommodating law to his nature as developed in that sacred book.[69]

Reformers employed science in vain to cure the vices of mankind. "Christianity is alone equal to this business."[70] In arguing for the Bible as a school book, Rush maintained that

> If moral precepts alone could have reformed mankind, the mission of the Son of God into our world, would have been unnecessary. He came to promulgate a system of doctrines, as well as a system of morals. The perfect morality of the gospel rests upon a doctrine, which though often controverted, has never been refuted, I mean the vicarious life and death of the Son of God. This sublime and ineffable doctrine delivers us from the absurd hypotheses of modern philosophers, concerning the foundation of moral obligation, and fixes it upon the eternal and self moving principle of LOVE. It concentrates a whole system of ethics in a single text of scripture. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you." By withholding the knowledge of this doctrine from children, we deprive ourselves of the best means of awakening moral sensibility in their minds.[71]

[69]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993.

[70]Adams, Apr. 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545.

[71]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 125. Man's "caprice and folly" disunited religion and morals, "so happily paired by the Creator of the world" ("Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 247).

This tendency, in his last years, to reject scientific morality in favor of Biblical characterized a deepening religiosity that led him to "lay the foundation of national happiness only in religion, not by leaving it doubtful 'whether morals can exist without it,' but by asserting that without religion morals are the effects of causes as purely physical as pleasant breezes and fruitful seasons."[72]

In addition to Rush's complex analysis of the relation between Lockean environmentalism and morals, he also noted the effect of certain empirical mental processes on ethical conduct. In his essay on the moral faculty, he observed that imitation, habit, and association often regulated the decisions of the moral sense.[73] If shape, texture, and condition of the body influenced morals, then efforts to imitate "the features and external manners" of moral examples, he reasoned, aided proper moral behavior. What convinced Rush of the probable success of this experiment was the "fact" that men who resembled each other generally possessed the same manners and dispositions, that servants of kind masters often resembled them not only in appearance but in manners, and that husbands and wives of long standing

[72]Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096. Rush wrote Ashbel Green in 1807, "Nor should moral philosophy be taught in these schools [Presbyterian seminaries]. It is in its present form . . . 'infidelity systematized'" (Green, May 22, 1807, Letters, II, 946-947). Section VI on Rush's philosophical skepticism traces in detail his gradual loss of faith in human perfection.

[73]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 203-205.

frequently resembled each other in character as well as in appearance.

Moreover, "the mechanical effects of habit upon virtue," Rush was persuaded, caused virtues assumed by necessity or accident to become real. To illustrate this idea, he quoted Hamlet's advice to his mother:

> "Assume a virtue, if you have it not.
> That monster, Custom, who all sense doth eat
> Of habits evil, is angel yet in this,
> That to the use of actions fair and good
> He likewise gives a frock or livery,
> That aptly is put on. Refrain to-night,
> And that shall lend a kind of easiness
> To the next abstinence; the next more easy:
> For use can almost change the stamp of nature,
> And master even the devil, or throw him out,
> With wondrous potency."

The aged, he believed, preserved their morality, not by supernatural power, by wholly by habitually exercising their moral faculties.[74]

The influence of mental association on morals was so great, Rush believed, that a master could reform theft and drunkenness in a servant by secretly dissolving tartar emetic in a draught of liquor. "The recollection of the pain and sickness excited by the emetic, naturally associates itself with the spirits, so as to render them both equally the objects of aversion." Moses, he suggested, used this principle of association when he ground the golden calf into a powder, dissolved it in water (by means of hepar sulphuris), and forced the idolators to drink it.

[74]"On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, pp. 350-351.

Since thereafter they associated idolatry with this very bitter and nauseating mixture, they rejected it "with equal abhorrence." With these examples in mind, Rush reasoned that "the advantage of association would be more certain," if punishment quickly followed a crime and if it was administered at the scene of the misdeed. The reformation of criminals by change of place and company, he added, probably resulted from eliminating harmful associations.[75]

Certainly what we have discussed thus far concerning Rush's empiricism supports his belief that "facts," the data of the senses, formed the basis of all true knowledge, except perhaps Biblical. What we shall consider now is whether or not empirical facts were, to Rush, superior to Lockean reasoning or reflection--that process of the mind, which "consists in drawing inferences from facts."[76] There

[75]Rush advised his medical students "to attend to that principle in the human mind, which constitutes the association of ideas, in your intercourse with your patients. . . . this principle is of . . . immediate application in those chronic diseases which affect the mind. Nothing can be accomplished here, till we produce a new association of ideas" ("Duties of a Physician," 1789, Selected Writings, pp. 313-314).

[76]"Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 246; Rush also defined reason as "the power of judging truth, as well as the power of comprehending it" ("Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 211). Reasoning on any subject was dangerous, he felt, if one were not qualified for it by education ("Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 246). If man was disposed to false reasoning, this yet showed "the depth" of the principle in the human mind. In short, man was "necessarily" a reasoning creature ("1792-1813," p. 335, Aug. 9, 1809). Rush himself was well known for his analogical reasoning. Samuel Cooper wrote that Rush "infers

is no doubt he granted primacy to facts over opinions that disregarded what man experienced through his physical senses. Rush complained that the printing press led men to depend more on "opinions" than on "facts," more on other people's senses than on their own. Only a few farmers, seamen, and mechanics who cultivated the ability to observe closely retained the true scientific method.[77] Likewise, because philosophically inclined doctors, generalizing wildly on insufficient data, created inaccurate and over-simplified medical "systems," Rush felt compelled to reform nosology.[78]

Rush frequently underscored the significance of factual knowledge--that is, knowledge attained solely through the physical senses. The Author of Nature, he declared, emphasized the importance of facts when He made natural history "the first study of the father of mankind, in the garden of Eden. It furnishes the raw materials of knowledge

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all this [the unitary theory of disease] from many circumstances & elucidates the Whole by analogical Reasoning for which you know he is remarkably famous" (Samuel Cooper to William Bache, Jan. 9, 1795--quote in Letters, I, 584 n. 1). An examination of virtually any of Rush's essays, letters, or journals verifies Cooper's observation as well as his tendency to reason syllogistically (See, for example, "On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, pp. 35, 37, 47-48, and Mary Stockton, Sept. 7, 1788, Letters, I, 483-486).

[77]Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), p. 168; Boorstin, p. 129.

[78]"Progress," 1801, Selected Writings, pp. 233-236; Boorstin, p. 133.

upon all subjects."[79] Rush himself kept a small notebook in which he recorded the "home-made" remedies of nurses, laymen, and even quacks. Though he called this his "Quack Recipe Book," he regarded these recipes as a means to "facts in the history and cure of diseases which have escaped the most sagacious observers of nature."[80] "Hippocrates," he observed, ". . . copied only from the book of nature; and it is to the stability, which the truth and correctness of his facts have given to his works, that they have descended to us in safety along the deep and rapid stream of time in spite of the constant tendency of his false reasonings to overset them."[81] These observations suggest that Rush esteemed facts more than reasoning.

Yet Rush was not unqualified in his praise of empirical facts. "To no purpose," he told his students in a lecture on medical progress, "would an antidiluvian age be employed in collecting facts upon all the different branches of medicine, unless they can be connected and applied by principles of some kind. Observation without principles is nothing but empiricism." Admitting that

[79]"The Influence of Physical Causes in Promoting an Increase of Strength and Activity of the Intellectual Faculties of Man," Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 103; Boorstin, pp. 129, 272 n. 17.

[80]Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 168; Boorstin, p. 129; "Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, pp. 319-320. The facts obtained from such sources, Rush suggested, might lead to new discoveries in symptoms of diseases, animal economy, nosology, or medical theory (Ibid., p. 320). See also Jefferson, May 5, 1803, Letters, II, 863.

[81]"Opinions and Modes of Practice of Hippocrates," Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 290; Boorstin, pp. 129-130.

theories were often uncertain and contradictory, he maintained nevertheless that there was "much greater" inconsistency and uncertainty in controversies over "what are said to be facts, and that too upon subjects in which the senses alone are employed to judge between truth and error." Between physicians who utilized principles in medicine and those who relied "exclusively upon experience," Rush concluded, the same difference existed as "between Sir Isaac Newton, after he completed his discoveries in light and colours, and the artist who manufactured the glasses, by which that illustrious philosopher exemplified his principles in optics."[82]

Actually Rush criticized both empirics and dogmatists: "The former pretend to be guided by experience, and the latter by reasoning alone. . . ." In his "Observations and Reasoning in Medicine," he objected to both "when separately employed" because an exclusive reliance on either led to error. For example, in medicine empiricism presupposed a complete knowledge of all human diseases--an obvious impossibility Rush felt, especially since the memory was the least reliable faculty of the mind. Likewise, the theorist, from "the nature of the human mind" disposed to reason upon all subjects whether or not qualified by education or experience, failed to consider

82"Progress," 1801, Selected Writings, pp. 243-244. Rush lamented to Adams that "there are empirics in all professions as well as medicine. The world will not bear principles in practical sciences" (Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1155).

the limitations of the human understanding as well as the harmful influence of the imagination and the passions upon reason in its quest for truth. Thus he concluded that if the mischief done by the empirics and the dogmatists were compared, "neither sect would have any cause of exultation, or triumph."[83]

If anything, Rush gave slight precedence to theory over practice in science--as he put it:

> The numerous benefits and pleasures we enjoy from the glasses which have been made use of to extend our vision to distant and minute objects, are the results of a knowledge of the principles of optics. The many useful inventions which are employed to shorten and facilitate labor, are the products of a knowledge of the principles of mechanics and hydraulics. The exploits of mariners in subduing the ocean, and all the benefits that have occurred to the world from the connection of the extremities of our globe by means of commerce, are the fruits of a knowledge in the principles of navigation. Equally great have been the advantages of theory in the science of medicine. It belongs to theory to accumulate facts; and hence we find the greatest stock of them is always possessed by speculative physicians. While simple observation may be compared to a power which creates an alphabet, theory resembles a power which arranges all its component parts in such a manner, as to produce words and ideas. But theory does more. It supplies in a great degree the place of experience, and thereby places youth and old age nearly upon a footing in the profession of medicine; for, with just principles, it is no more necessary for a young physician to see all the diseases of the human body before he prescribes for them, than it is for a mariner, who knows the principles of navigation, to visit all the ports

[83]"Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 245-247.

> in the world, in order to conduct his vessel in safety to them.[84]

Observation, Rush concluded, was limited, but "thinking leads to principles." Facts were "fac totum" men, employed in the service of reasoning. "Like stones in a field," they were "useless 'till collected and arranged in a building."[85]

What Rush wanted ideally, of course, was the union of experience and reasoning, of facts and principles. Observation and theory "are necessarily united, and it is only by preserving and cultivating their union" that science conveyed enduring benefits to mankind.[86] This union, according to Rush, was one of the natural processes of the mind. Using medicine to illustrate his point, he asserted:

> As well might we attempt to control the motions of the heart by the action of the will, as to suspend, for a moment, that operation of the mind, which consists in drawing inferences from facts. To observe, is to think, and to think, is to reason in medicine. Hence we find theories in the writings of the most celebrated practical physicians, even of those who preface their works by declaiming against idle and

[84] Ibid., p. 248. "The human mind runs as naturally into principles as it does after facts" ("Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 89).

[85] "1792-1813," pp. 347-348. "God reveals some truths to our senses and to our first perceptions, but many errors are conveyed into the mind through both, which are to be corrected only by reason" (Ibid., p. 336, Dec. 21, 1809).

[86] "Observations and Reasoning," Selected Writings, pp. 247-248.

> visionary speculations in our science; but, I will add, further, that I believe no empiric ever gave a medicine without cherishing a theoretical indication of cure in his mind.[87]

Though "facts may appear to lie in a confused and solitary state," he added, "they will sooner or later unite in that order and relation to each other which was established at the creation of the world."[88]

It was important, then, to realize that facts and reasoning were parts of the same process. First, suggested Rush, there were facts, which "by the fermentation they excite in the mind . . . prepare it for embracing with facility the principles of general science."[89] Then there was reasoning, a "fermenting process" that changed the juice of the grape--"observation, reading, and experiments"--

[87]Ibid., p. 246. "In answer to what has been delivered in favor of the union of experience and reasoning in medicine, it has been said, that the most celebrated physicians, in all ages, have been empirics; among whom they class Hippocrates and Sydenham. This charge against the illustrious fathers of ancient and modern medicine is not just, for they both reasoned upon the causes, symptoms, and cure of diseases; and their works contain more theory, than is to be met with in many of the most popular systems of medicine. Their theories, it is true, are in many instances erroneous; but they were restrained from perverting their judgments, and impairing the success of their practice, by their great experience, and singular talents for extensive and accurate observation. This defence of Hippocrates and Sydenham does not apply to common empirics. They cure only by change; for, by false reasoning, they detract from the advantages of their solitary experience" (Ibid., pp. 249-250).

[88]Ibid., p. 252.

[89]"Intellectual Faculties," Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 103; Boorstin, p. 272 n. 17.

into wine. "It belongs exclusively to this sublime operation of the mind to strain the knowledge, derived from other sources, from its feculent parts, and to convert it into pure and durable science."[90]

Unfortunately, man divided what the Author of Nature intended to be indivisible. "The caprice and folly of man," Rush charged, "disunited" reason and the senses, "so happily paired by the Creator of the world." The attempt "to separate experience and reasoning in medicine" was an example of the "evils which have arisen from this breach in the symmetry of the divine government." Rush hoped that the philosopher could heal the mind's hostility "to order and utility" and restore "this union of prerelated truths."[91]

In this section we analyzed the empirical and environmental aspects of Rush's philosophy--his belief that all knowledge was the result of sensory impressions upon the mind.

[90]"Practice of Hippocrates," Sixteen Introductory Lectures, pp. 291-292. Curiously, Boorstin, p. 130, uses Rush's grape-wine figure as evidence that Rush discredited reasoning in favor of facts. As Rush's designation of reasoning as a "sublime operation of the mind" and his essays on "The Progress of Medicine" and "Observations and Reasoning in Medicine" show, he was not an empiric, but rather urged a combination of empiricism and reasoning, facts and principles. In contrast, Jefferson was an empiric who attacked the folly of medical theorizing. See his letter to Dr. Caspar Wistar, June 21, 1807, The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh (Washington, 1903-1904), XI, 242-248. When Rush wrote prescriptions for Jefferson, e.g., March 12, 1803, Letters, II, 856-859; May 5, 1803, Letters, II, 863-864; Aug. 26, 1811, Letters, II, 1098-1099, he respected Jefferson's skeptical views concerning theory and recommended empirical remedies.

[91]"Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 247, 252.

We emphasized the implications of empiricism for his educational concepts, the implications of environmentalism for his political, economic, and ethical beliefs, while noting that his theological concept of depravity and his belief in the necessity of uniting facts and principles modified his empirical views to some extent. In particular, we stressed the clash between science and religion in his speculations on morality, between his physiology of morals and his orthodox views on moral conduct. We shall consider his dissatisfaction with certain aspects of the Lockean concept of reason in the concluding sections of this chapter.

III. Rush's Doctrine of Materialism

A philosophical materialism based on certain biological theories--i. e., the concept that all life (whether physical or "spiritual") was the result of material stimuli acting upon the body and mind--was the most important implication of Rush's empiricism. In developing his materialistic views, then, he turned once again to science, in this case, to natural history and physiology, for the basis of his thinking. In this section we shall examine Rush's doctrine of materialism and consider its impact on his concepts of necessity, thought, morality, and theology.

He formally expounded his philosophy of materialism in Three Lectures upon Animal Life (1799), although he frequently added to it in his commonplace books, lectures, essays, and letters.[92] In these lectures, materialism formed the basis of his thoughts on physical and mental life, for, according to Rush, matter produced external and internal impressions, or stimuli, in the body, which excited sensation, motion, and thought--and he included all three in the life of the human body. Though "perfect life," he explained, consisted of all three, perhaps only motion was necessary for life because both sensation and thought

[92] Three Lectures upon Animal Life, Delivered in the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1799)--The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), pp. 133-180.

depended on motion for their existence.[93]

To explain how impressions stimulated these life-producing activities in the human body, Rush called the power by which impressions activated sensation "sensibility," and the property by which impressions excited motion "excitability."[94] Each part of the body (except hair and nails) contained these capacities of sensibility and excitability, and when impressions excited them in one part of the body, they likewise affected them in the rest of the body. Thus the human body, he asserted, was "an unit, or a simple and indivisible quality, or substance" whose "capacity for receiving motion, and sensation" was "modified" by the senses which, in turn, were stimulated by impressions.[95]

What Rush concluded was that "Life is the EFFECT of

[93] Ibid., p. 135. Later in these lectures, however, Rush suggested that sensation was necessary to life (Ibid., p. 167). In explaining the laws of animal matter, Rush preferred the term motion to Hartley's terms oscillation and vibration because it was simpler and "better adapted to common comprehension" (Ibid., p. 135).

[94] Motion included both imperceptible and obvious kinds. Whether this excitability was a property of animal matter or a distinct "substance" of itself was of "no consequence" to his theory of "animal life," though he favored the latter view (Ibid., p. 136).

[95] Ibid., pp. 135-136. Rush divided these impressions, or stimuli, into external and internal. "The external are light, sound, odors, air, heat, exercise, and the pleasures of the senses. The internal stimuli are food, drinks, chyle, the blood, a certain tension of the glands, which contain secreted liquors, and the exercises of the faculties of the mind" (Ibid, p. 137).

certain stimuli acting upon the sensibility, and excitability which are extended in different degrees, over every external, and internal part of the body." As he explained,

> . . . the action of the brain, the diastole, and systole of the heart, the pulsation of the arteries, the contraction of the muscles, the peristaltic motion of the bowels, the absorbing power of the lymphatics, secretion, excretion, hearing, seeing, smelling, taste, and the sense of touch, nay more, thought itself, are all the effects of stimuli acting upon the organs of sense and motion.[96]

Rush confessed he did not know what "the precise nature of that form of matter . . . capable of producing life, from impressions made upon it" was, or whether its power was derived from mental stimuli or was inherent in animal fibres. Nor did he think it necessary to know; it was enough for his purpose of explaining the cause of life "to know the fact." This naive faith in fact, this refusal to analyze its meanings, which characterized the materialistic assumptions of modern science--as A. N. Whitehead pointed out in Science and the Modern World--is revealed in Rush's assertion that whatever the explanation for life, "The influences are the same in favour of life being the effect of stimuli, and of its being as truly mechanical, as the movements of a clock from the pressures of its weights, or the passage of a ship in the water, from the impulse of winds, and the tide."[97]

[96]Ibid., pp. 136-137.

[97]Ibid., pp. 174-175; A. N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (New York, 1925), p. 17.

Rush underscored the materialistic implications of this theory of bodily and mental life when he stressed that "These stimuli are as necessary to its existence, as air is to flame."[98] Animal life, he declared, was

> as much an effect of impressions upon a peculiar species of matter, as sound is of the stroke of a hammer upon a bell, or music, of the motion of the bow upon the strings of a violin. I exclude therefore the intelligent principle of Whytt, the medical mind of Stahl, the healing powers of Cullen, and the vital principle of John Hunter, as much from the body, as I do an intelligent principle from air, fire, and water.[99]

As Whitehead contended, scientific materialism assumes the ultimate fact of an irreducible material--"senseless, valueless, purposeless"--doing "what it does do, following a fixed routine imposed by external relations which do not spring from the nature of its being."[100]

[98] Ibid., p. 136. To support his position he noted that Dr. John Brown and Dr. William Cullen, formulators of the best-known medical theories of the time, had made similar observations. Brown had maintained that life was "a forced state," and Cullen (though he later rejected it) that "the human body is not an automaton, or self-moving machine; but is kept alive, and in motion by the constant action of stimuli upon it" (Ibid., pp. 136-137).

[99] Ibid., p. 174.

[100] Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 18. In a paper delivered to the Philadelphia Medical Society, entitled Elements of Life, or the Laws of Vital Matter, Rush's son, John, carried his father's theory to its extreme, maintaining the materiality of the mind, of life in general, of nature, and of the "first cause" (George W. Corner, ed. "Appendix 3," Autobiography, Princeton, 1948, p. 370).

Aware of the implications of his doctrine of materialism, Rush readily applied it to his views on metaphysics, theology, and morality. In philosophy, materialism led Rush to reject the theory of innate ideas, to view both the mind and the body as moved by the same causes and therefore subject to the same laws, and to consider thought itself as having material existence.

The materialistic doctrine of life, Rush maintained, "enables us to reject the doctrine of innate ideas, and to ascribe all our knowledge of sensible objects to impressions acting upon an innate capacity to receive ideas." Thus, if a child could reach maturity without using any of his senses, he not only would lack "a single idea of a material object," but since all knowledge "is compounded of simple ideas, this person would be as destitute of knowledge of every kind, as the grossest portion of vegetable, or fossil matter."[101] "As well might we attempt to excite thought in a piece of marble by striking it with our hand," said Rush, "as expect to produce a single operation of the mind in a person deprived of the external senses. . . ."[102]

Moreover, as Rush hoped to demonstrate in Diseases of the Mind (1812), he believed the mind and the body were

[101]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 177-178.

[102]Diseases of the Mind (Philadelphia, 1812), p. 10; I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 97.

"moved by the same causes and subject to the same laws."[103] To illustrate his point, he noted that the causes, symptoms, and remedies of bodily and moral diseases were the same. "Is debility the predisposing cause of disease in the body? so it is of vice in the mind."[104] Thus philosophical materialism suggested a connection between physical and mental well-being--a relationship that Rush explored scientifically in his study of mental disease.[105] If "all the operations in the mind are the

[103]Adams, Nov. 4, 1812, Letters, II, 1164. See also "Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 277. In Diseases of the Mind, Rush emphasized "the sameness of the laws which govern the body and the moral faculties of man" (Diseases of the Mind, 1812, p. 360; Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, New York, 1948, p. 275 n. 34). Rush hinted of the proper attitude for "an inquirer after philosophical truth" when he suggested that such a person "should consider the passions of men in the same light that he does the laws of matter or motion" ("Influence of the American Revolution," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 333).

[104]Diseases of the Mind, p. 360; Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 275 n. 34.

[105]If physical causes activated the mind, so to a certain extent the mind influenced the physical body. "The mind and body," Rush believed, "have a reciprocal action upon each other" ("Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, p. 366). Thus a moderate exercise of the mental faculties such as the understanding "produce health and long life" ("On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, pp. 343-344). As he expressed it in his Lectures on Animal Life: "The exercises of the faculties of the mind have a wonderful influence in increasing the quantity of human life. . . . This view, of the reaction of the mind upon the body, accords with the simplicity of other operations in the animal economy. It is thus the brain repays the heart for the blood it conveys to it, by reacting upon its muscular fibres.--The influence of the different faculties of the mind is felt in the pulse, in the stomach, and in the liver, and is seen in the face, and other external parts of the body. Those which act most unequivocally in promoting

effects of motions previously excited in the brain, and every idea and thought appears to depend upon a motion peculiar to itself," then in a healthy mental state "these motions are regular, and succeed impressions upon the brain with the same certainty and uniformity that perceptions succeed impressions upon the senses in their sound state," but in a deranged state of the mind these motions are irregular. The application of these principles, Rush hoped, "shall lead to general success in the treatment of the diseases of the mind."[106]

In a 1799 lecture, "On the Influence of Physical Causes in Promoting an Increase of Strength and Activity of the Intellectual Faculties of Man," Rush, as the title suggests, argued in terms of materialism, that physical

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life, are the understanding, the imagination, and the passions. Thinking belongs to the understanding, and is attended with an obvious influence upon the degree and duration of life. Intense study has often rendered the body insensible to the debilitating effects of cold, and hunger. Men of great and active understandings, who blend with their studies, temperance and exercise, are generally long lived. . . . The imagination acts with great force upon the body. . . . But the passions pour a constant stream upon the wheels of life. . . . The effects of the good passions and emotions, in promoting health and longevity, have been taken notice of by many writers. They produce a flame, gentle and pleasant, like oil perfumed with frankincense in the lamp of life. There are instances likewise of persons who have derived strength, and long life from the influence of the evil passions and emotions" ("Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 143-145). See also Ibid., p. 141; "On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 350; "Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, pp. 366-367.

106 Diseases of the Mind, p. 11; Preface, p. vi; Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 98.

causes did promote mental vigor and strength. All of the operations of the mind, he maintained, "are the effects of bodily impressions," a belief according with "the old and long received axiom of the schools--viz. 'Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuit in sensu,' that is, . . . the understanding contains no knowledge of any kind, but what was conveyed to it through the avenues of the senses."[107] If this were true, then physicians could utilize the principles of physiology to promote mental health. Thus it was that Jonathan Edwards rode a trotting horse to stimulate his thoughts, that Joseph Priestley strengthened his mind by writing upon every subject he wanted to comprehend perfectly, and that frequent elections in republics increased mental vigor.[108] It was possible, therefore, to create a science of the mind, in terms of physiological materialism:

> It is by the exercise of the body, and the collision of our intellects, by means of business, and conversation, that we impart to them, agreeable and durable vigor. . . . The effects of this action and reaction, in making addition to the intellects and knowledge, lead us to admit the assertion of Condorcet, that the time will come, when all the knowledge we now possess will appear to the generations that are to succeed us, as the knowledge now possessed by children appears to us. . . . From what has been delivered, gentlemen, it appears, that the enlargement and activity of our intellects,

[107] "Intellectual Faculties," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 88-89; Riley, p. 91.

[108] Ibid., 94, 106, 109-110; Riley, p. 91.

> are as much within our power as the health and movements of our bodies.[109]

Rush's concept that the "soul" or "thought" had material existence was the most significant philosophical implication of his materialistic views. Like all other functions of the body, thought, he believed, resulted from "stimuli acting upon the organs of sense and motion."[110] As he explained, the pleasures of the mind are "the effects of impressions of a certain definite or moderate degree of force, accompanied with motions of a regular or harmonious nature in the brain and heart and communicated by them to the mind."[111] "We think by force, as well as live by force. If any man doubt the truth of this assertion, let

[109] Ibid., pp. 113, 114, 115; Riley, p. 92. The weakness of the "intellects" in savages, Rush observed, was due to the absence of physical stimuli upon their minds (Ibid., pp. 116-117; Boorstin, p. 86). The manuscript notes of one of Rush's students recorded other examples of the influence of bodily causes on the strength of the mind: the brain, like the lower limbs, lasted if it was exercised; just as the body was stimulated by air, so was the mind stimulated by motives (Purnell MS., Medical and Chirurgical Faculty Library, Baltimore, p. 96; Riley, p. 92).

[110] "Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 137. Though the exercise of mental faculties increased the quantity of animal life, Rush hastened to add that the mind acted "by reflection only, after having been previously excited into action by impressions made upon the body" (Ibid., p. 143).

[111] "Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), p. 452; Riley, p. 97. This was to be inferred, said Rush, from dissections, "which discover marks of undue or irregular excitement in the brain and of rupture or disorganization in the heart, where death has been the consequence of an excess of intellectual or moral pleasure" (Ibid.).

him cease to think."[112] Reasoning, he observed, is "as much an involuntary act, as the pulsations of the heart and arteries."[113] Rush's essay on the moral faculty attempted to demonstrate therefore that the opinions of people were usually the result of particular physical causes.[114]

Rush's concept of thought as material challenged traditional philosophical thinking about the body and the

[112]Boorstin, p. 121; Rush, Medical Inquiries and Observations, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1815), I, 50.

[113]Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 241; Boorstin, p. 121.

[114]Boorstin, p. 121. In a number of his essays, Rush enumerated various physical influences on the faculties of the mind. Slavery, he suggested, often paralyzed the will and imagination of the bondsman. Physical stimulus, such as excessive urine in the bladder, increased the activity of passions and the understanding in dreams ("Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 168-169, 150). Rush noted that "ardent spirits" frequently impaired memory, debilitated the understanding, and perverted the moral sense ("The Effects of Ardent Spirits upon Man," 1805, Selected Writings, pp. 338-339). "The fear of corporal punishments, by debilitating the body, produces a corresponding debility in the mind, which contracts its capacity of acquiring knowledge" ("The Amusements and Punishments Which are Proper for Schools," 1790, Selected Writings, p. 112). In the essay on the moral faculty, Rush detailed the effects of physical causes upon memory, imagination, and judgment. For example, he noted the connection between intellectual faculties and the firmness of the brain in childhood, between genius and certain physical features, and between intelligence and heredity. He observed that physical factors such as disease or madness could diminish or enlarge the powers of memory, imagination, or judgment, even could produce a partial insanity of one of them ("The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 183-189). "Do we ever observe a partial insanity, or false perception on one subject, while the judgment is sound and correct, upon all others?" (Ibid., p. 187).

"soul." If thought was nothing but a subtle form of matter set in motion by impressions, then philosophy no longer needed to regard the body and the mind as distinct entities. They were of one substance--as he put it, "the machine of both soul and body."[115] Man, he emphasized, is "a single and indivisible being, for so intimately united are his soul and body, that one cannot be moved, without the other."[116] To illustrate this, Rush explained that God had "cast" man's body and soul simultaneously "in the same mould" by the same physical stimuli:

> "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." The common explanation of this passage of Scripture is, that God, in this act, infused a soul into the torpid, or lifeless body of Adam, and that his soul became its principle of life, or in other words, that he thus changed a dead mass of animalized matter, into an animated being. That this was not the case I infer, not only from the existence of life in many persons in whom the soul is in a dormant or torpid state from diseases in the brain, but from a more liberal and correct translation of the above passage of Scripture. . . . It is as follows. "And the Lord God breathed into his nostrils, the air of lives, and he became a living soul." That is, he dilated his nostrils, and thereby inflated his lungs with air, and thus excited in him, animal, intellectual and spiritual life, in consequence of which he became an animated human creature. From this view of the origin of life in Adams, it appears that his soul and body were cast in the same mould, and at the

[115]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 464.

[116]"On the Utility of a Knowledge of the Faculties and Operations of the Mind to a Physician," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), p. 256; Riley, p. 94.

> same time, and that both were animated by the same act of Divine power by means of the same stream of air.[117]

Rush believed each new-born infant received life and thought in the same way. At birth, the physical stimulus of air expanded the lungs and thus life began. In turn the lungs stimulated the heart, the heart the brain, the brain the "mind," and the interaction of brain and mind stimulated the rest of the body.[118] In such a manner, according to Rush, man was an integrated, altogether material being.[119]

In morality, Rush's belief in the materiality of the "soul" inevitably led him to reject free will as a principle of conduct and to attribute moral actions largely to the effect of physical causes. Human actions, he asserted, resulted from "the impressions of motives upon the will." Using his doctrine of "animal life" for evidence, he denied that the will possessed power to determine its own conduct. "As well might we admit an inherent principle of life in animal matter, as a self-determining power in this faculty of the mind." Without the stimulus of motives, "there could be no more a will than there could be vision

[117] Medical Inquiries, I, 8; Boorstin, p. 113.

[118] Ibid.

[119] Rush praised Joseph Priestley for defending "in a new and popular dress ancient opinions upon the action of the will and the materiality of the mind" (Adams, Aug. 22, 1806, Letters, II, 927). On Priestley's materialism and its implications in religion, see Boorstin, pp. 113-114.

without light, or hearing without sound."[120] Thus, physical causes such as "sensibility, habit, imitations, and association" formed the "great principles of human conduct." In educating young people, Rush urged that their studies be interspersed with physical exercise, manual labor, moderate sleep, and occasional solitude so that these physical causes might beneficially influence their intellects, principles, and morals.[121]

In the Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty (1786), which argued, as the title indicates, that physical causes did condition the moral faculty, Rush explained moral reformation in such material, physical terms.[122] Maintaining that the Creator operated in the moral world "by the instrumentality of second causes," he cited Biblical examples in which physical influences

[120]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 178. "It is true," Rush added, these impressions "are often so obscure as not to be perceived; and they sometimes become insensible from habit, but the same things have been remarked in the operation of stimuli; and yet we do not upon this account deny their agency in producing animal life" (Ibid.).

[121]"Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, pp. 91-92. In "The Amusements and Punishments Which Are Proper for Schools" (1790), Rush noted that corporal punishments inflicted on school children tended "to destroy all moral sensibility" ("Amusements," 1790, Selected Writings, pp. 110-111).

[122]I. Woodbridge Riley, p. 90, notes that this essay shows Rush in transition between common sense realism and materialism. Though he still maintained that the moral faculty was an inherent faculty not derived from sensory impressions, he devoted most of the essay to a disquisition on the various physical influences that conditioned it.

served as "the means of reformation from vice." Solitude and a vegetable diet cured Nebuchadnezzar's pride; David's harp cured Saul's evil spirit. Rush added,

> in favour of divine influence upon the moral principle, that in those extraordinary cases, where bad men are suddenly reformed, without the instrumentality of physical, moral or rational causes, I believe that the organization of those parts of the body, in which the faculties of the mind are seated, undergoes a physical change; and hence the expression of a "new creature," which is made use of in the Scriptures to denote this change, is proper in a literal, as well as a figurative sense. It is probably the beginning of that perfect renovation of the human body, which is predicted by St. Paul in the following words: "For our conversation is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, who shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned according to his own glorious body."[123]

Rush's doctrine of materialism, then, lay behind his belief that physical causes decisively influenced moral behavior.

In religion, his materialism might very well have led Rush to an agnostic or atheistic position, or at least to a rejection of Christianity in favor of some form of natural religion. But such was not the case. He found no incompatibility between his religious beliefs and his

[123]"Moral Faculty," 1798, Selected Writings, pp. 201-202. In a footnote, Rush observed that "St. Paul was suddenly transformed from a persecutor into a man of a gentle and amiable spirit. The manner in which this change was effected upon his mind, he tells us in the following words: 'Neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. From henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear in my body the marks of our Lord Jesus.' Galatians vi. 15, 17" (Ibid., p. 202 n.).

materialistic philosophy of life and morals. Instead materialism became his ally in defending orthodox religion and combating atheism.[124] In fact, his materialistic doctrine of life furnished Rush with a powerful justification of orthodox religion. That religion benefited the health of the human body and mind, he claimed, alone sufficed to recommend its acceptance. Since man was naturally a religious animal, atheism, "the worst of sedatives to the understanding, and passions," did irreparable harm to his mental faculties. He was convinced of the "necessary and immutable connection between the texture of the human mind, and the worship of an object of some kind... . ." Because religion elevated the understanding and passions, it was "friendly to animal life." This was particularly true of Christianity. "Such is the salutory operation of its doctrines, and precepts upon health and life," Rush concluded, "that if its divine authority rested upon no other argument, this alone would be sufficient to recommend it to our belief."[125]

Rush's rejection of the freedom of the will posed no problem for him in theology. ". . . I cannot help bearing a testimony," he stressed in his Lectures on Animal Life, "against the gloomy misapplication of this doctrine

[124]Rush acknowledge that theologians criticized his materialistic views. See Adams, Sept. 8, 1810, Letters, II, 1061.

[125]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 170-171.

by some modern writers. When properly understood, it is calculated to produce the most comfortable views of the divine government, and the most beneficial effects upon morals, and human happiness." The principle of free will, on the other hand, was an "impious" error made innocuous by an innocent name--one "which has had the most baneful influence upon morals and religion." "To suppose a principle to reside necessarily, and constantly in the human body, which acted independently of external circumstances," he explained, "is to ascribe to it an attribute, which I shall not connect, even in language, with the creature man. Self existence belongs only to God." It was precisely because his doctrine of life "directly opposed" this error and supported the Calvinistic concept of God's absolute sovereignty that it was of incalculable aid to religion.[126]

"The best criterion of the truth of a philosophical opinion," Rush maintained, "is its tendency to produce exalted ideas, of the Divine Being, and humble views of ourselves." He was certain that his theory of the materialistic basis of life not only met these requirements to "an eminent degree" but eliminated a potential source of atheism, for

> It does homage to the Supreme Being, as the governor of the universe, and establishes the certainty of his universal, and particular providence. Admit a principle of life in the human body, and we open a door for the

[126] Ibid., p. 178.

> restoration of the old Epicurean or atheistical philosophy, which supposed the world to be governed by a principle called nature, and which was believed to be inherent in every kind of matter. The doctrine I have taught, cuts the sinews of this error; for by rendering the continuance of animal life, no less than its commencement, the effect of the constant operation of divine power and goodness, it leads us to believe that the whole creation is supported in the same manner.[127]

This materialistic view of man's dependence upon divine power, Rush felt, provided a rational support for the Scriptural concepts of God's sovereignty and Christ's divinity. It "leads us," he explained, "to contemplate with very opposite and inexpressible feelings, the sublime idea which is given of the Deity in the scriptures, as possessing life 'within himself.'" Moreover, since God imparted this "divine prerogative" only to his Son, the New Testament designated Christ as the "life of the world," "the prince of life," and "life."[128] "These divine epithets which are very properly, founded upon the manner of our Saviour's existence," Rush concluded, "exalt him infinitely above simple humanity, and establish his divine nature upon the basis of reason, as well as revelation."[129] Rush found in science, then, reasons for accepting certain

[127] Ibid., pp. 178-179.

[128] Rush quoted John, v, 26: "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life within himself" (Ibid., p. 179).

[129] Ibid., p. 179.

Calvinistic tenets previously grounded on faith and logic.

Rush could see no reason why the materiality of the soul, a conclusion drawn from the doctrine that physical causes conditioned the moral faculty, threatened belief in its immortality. On the contrary, writers who connected the immortality of the soul with its immateriality injured "that truth" greatly. "The immortality of the soul," he contended, "depends upon the will of the Deity, and not upon the supposed properties of spirit." Matter, Rush pointed out, was "as immortal as spirit," for however various its forms, only God could destroy it. What was the concept of the indestructibility of matter, then, but a scientific verification of the soul's immortality?[130]

From his theory that material impressions upon the senses produced bodily and mental life, Rush developed, then, a philosophy that revealed, as I. Woodbridge Riley notes, three familiar characteristics of materialism: a sensationalistic view of perception, a phenomenalistic view of substance, and a deterministic view of volition.[131] Convinced that his materialistic views which emphasized thought as material were not hostile to his orthodox religious beliefs, he attempted to establish a scientific basis for morals and religion.

Yet paradoxically Rush also revealed a degree of

[130]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 190-191.

[131]Riley, p. 92.

uncertainty about his materialistic convictions, for elsewhere he challenged and qualified all three features of his materialism. He countered his empirical theory of knowledge with a belief in certain innate powers of the mind, and his concept of thought as having material existence with a dualism of mind and matter. Thus the moral faculty was "a native principle" not derived from either "experience" or "reflection."[132] The paradox was suggested nicely in his lecture "On the Utility of a Knowledge of the Faculty and Operations of the Mind to a Physician," in 1805: though Rush declared, in monistic terms, that the soul and body were one "single and indivisible being," he divided this indissoluble being into many mental faculties, including "the principle of faith," "the moral faculty," "conscience," and an innate "sense of Deity."[133] In another lecture Rush told his medical students that the mind was immaterial and capable of existing independently of the body, adding, with a Calvinistic twist, that there was no necessary connection between the immateriality and the immortality of the mind, the one being a divine attribute, the other a divine gift.[134]

He also offset his deterministic denial of free will with arguments for a union of liberty and necessity. When

[132]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 181.

[133]"Utility," 1805, Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), pp. 256-257; Riley, p. 94.

[134]Purnell MS., p. 81; Riley, p. 91.

Rush wrote a manuscript on "Liberty and Necessity," which he planned to add to the end of his Lectures on Animal Life, he revealed, in spite of his hopes to the contrary, that the scientific basis of his materialism failed to coalesce with his Christian orthodoxy--as Riley explains:

> This is a reactionary document, betraying the conflict between the spirit of orthodoxy and the spirit of free inquiry. As a projected addition to the essays on Animal Life it explains the opposition to the revival of the ancient "atheism" and also the closing confession that the author feels as if he had waded across a rapid and dangerous stream. The figure is a good one; it exhibits Rush as conscious of the drift of his speculations. And yet in opposing his dualistic occasionalism to a monistic hylozoism, he was but vainly struggling against the tendency of materialism toward a single unitary principle,--the reduction of both mind and matter to modifications of the same common substance.[135]

In the next three sections we shall continue to explore certain aspects of Rush's philosophical thought that conflicted with his basic empirical and materialistic views--his ideas on liberty and necessity, his occasional drift towards romanticism, and his developing skeptical fideism. We shall see that the conflict between his scientific,

[135]Riley, p. 94. "Occasionalism" is "a theory of knowledge and of voluntary control of action, in which mind and matter are non-interactive but events in one realm occur in correspondence with events in the other realm. Thus, God sees to it that an idea of noise occurs in a mind on the occasion of the occurrence of a physical noise; or, He makes a physical event happen when a mind wishes it" (Dagobert D. Runes, ed., Dictionary of Philosophy, Ames, Iowa, 1955, p. 218). "Hylozoism" is "the doctrine that life is a property of matter, that matter and life are inseparable, that life is derived from matter, or that matter has spiritual properties" (Ibid., p. 133).

rationalistic thought and his religious beliefs figures significantly in these philosophical contradictions.

IV. Rush's Views on Liberty and Necessity

Rush's concept of necessity was an important corollary to his philosophical and biological materialism, a natural adjunct to his belief that life and thought originated from sense impressions. "I have supposed," he told Adams, in rejecting the possibility of a perpetual motion machine, "that there is but one self-moving Being in the Universe, that all motion is the effect of his hand imposed upon matter, and all volition the effect of his will imposed upon mind. Weights and springs, and wind and water and steam are substitutes only to an ever-existing, ever-acting, and omnipresent power."[136] Here Rush's views differed somewhat from those of many Jeffersonians who, wary of predestinarian theology, treated man as a free moral agent.[137] Though Rush refused to conclude from his own materialistic views that men were involuntarily good or evil,[138] he

[136]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171.

[137]See Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 152-153. Jefferson, for example, wrote that God "has formed us moral agents. Not that, in the perfection of His state He can feel pain or pleasure in anything we may do; He is far above our power; but that we may promote the happiness of those with whom He has placed us in society, by acting honestly towards all, benevolently to those who fall within our way, respecting sacredly their rights, bodily and mental, and cherishing especially their freedom of conscience, as we value our own" (The Writings of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Washington, 1903-1904, XIV, 197-198: to Miles King, Sept. 26, 1814; Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 153).

[138]Boorstin, p. 153.

nevertheless could not reject the predestinarian theology of his youthful Presbyterian training. His conservative theology, coupled with his materialism, made Rush basically a necessitarian.

At times, however, Rush, influenced by his religious beliefs, ironically attempted to reconcile liberty and necessity, in terms hardly compatible with his materialistic views. Perhaps, as he recorded in his commonplace book in 1809, "The affairs of men are governed alternately by and contrary to their wills. . . ."[139] Why not believe, he asked in an entry dated August 14, 1811, ". . . the Union of liberty and necessity, and the agency of divine and human efforts in bringing about the Salvation of the soul"?[140] Such a theory, Rush thought, was possible if one considered man as having "a power in his Will to avoid evil and escape hell but not to renew his nature and prepare himself for heaven."[141]

In accounting for the paradoxical fact that the contrarieties of liberty and necessity seemed equally true, Rush frequently rejected rational explanations--like the

[139]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 334, c. 1809.

[140]Ibid., p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811.

[141]Ibid., p. 344. In his essay on the moral faculty (1786), Rush spoke of the will (in infernal spirits) losing its power to choose moral good ("The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes, New York, 1947, p. 185).

Trinity, they were "mysteries intelligible only, perhaps to the Creator."[142] "Our researches upon liberty and necessity are like the researches after perpetual motion," Rush confessed, yet he continued to speculate on the possibility of reconciling free will and determinism.[143]

In his manuscript notes on "Liberty and Necessity," Rush tried to reconcile these incongruous doctrines by distinguishing between prescience and predestination. Necessity was true because all things were present in the mind of God at once:

> Is it not absurd to talk of past or future when we speak of the knowledge of the Deity? Can anything be past or future to a being who exists from eternity to eternity? Are not past, present, and future to Him, one eternal now? Is not time a finite idea only, and past and future knowable only to finite beings? May not the moral actions of men then have appeared as complete to the Deity at the creation as the material world? . . . Imperfect man by memory sees past events--a wonderful power in a finite mind! May not a perfect being see future events in the same manner? They all have an existence in the eternal mind. There is nothing truly new in actions, any more than in truths under the sun. There can be no contingency with the Deity--all is fixed and immutable with Him; cause and effect, motive and action, creation and preservation, all one simple object and act. . . . The perfections of the Deity require this solution of this doctrine. Prescience is only a human term, but, like many others applied to the Deity in accommodation to our weak capacities.[144]

[142] Ibid., p. 340, August 14, 1811.

[143] Ibid., p. 336, Dec. 21, 1809.

[144] "Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-29, in I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 94.

But liberty was also true:

> So far for necessity. But all this is compatible with the most perfect liberty. The knowledge of God of actions flows from a perfect knowledge of the union between cause and effect in creation. All is still free. An artist can tell from the construction of a machine exactly its strokes, etc., without touching it after its wheels are set in motion, although he still upholds it in his hand. We live, move and have our being in God. . . . Nor does this idea destroy man's responsibility. He is still free. His liberty is essential to the necessity--otherwise his action would have no moral nature and could not be the object of pardon, and for this purpose alone evil existed. It must be free to be a crime, and crimes existed, not for a display of vindictive justice in endless punishment, but for the display of love in endless and universal happiness. This removes all the fears and difficulties about moral necessity. It was necessary that man should fall--it was likewise necessary that he should be free, or he could not have fallen. Liberty and necessity are, therefore, both true, and both necessary to advance in due consistency all the glorious attributes of God.[145]

Rush recorded three examples to illustrate the union of liberty and necessity:

> [1. I walk on the deck of a ship. Here is one free motion--the helmsman steers the ship in the direction in which I walk, and yet I am not influenced by his helm, nor he by my walking; we both direct our course the same way--he, by pointing the bow of the ship, makes me keep the same course with him, but without my knowledge or his influence over my will. 2. I resolve to take a walk to an adjoining village. This is the first act of

[145] Ibid., pp. 29-30, in Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 94. In chapter III, we shall examine the implications these comments have for Rush's concepts of evil, original sin, and universalism.

> my will. On my way I forget the original act of my will and occupy it upon twenty other objects, none of which have any connection with the first. Here then is a will within a will.] I require a perfect knowledge of a man's taste in building, and then convey secretly into his hands a plan of a house. Every act of this man in building this house is foreknown by me, and yet no influence is exercised over his will. Here is necessity and liberty united.[146]

In a passage in his lecture "Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Rush extolled the pleasurable effects that a belief in "the mysterious union of free agency and necessity" had upon the mind:

> We are barely pleased with what we understand; but the exercise of admiration is necessary to our intellectual happiness, and this can be employed only upon subjects which are removed beyond our comprehension. . . . while we thus contemplate, with delightful wonder, the union of free agency and necessity, we derive pleasure from a sense of each of their respective operations. The pleasure we enjoy in free agency is felt in the sacrifices that we make for the attainment and preservation of liberty . . . . in reflecting that we are masters of ourselves. . . . A belief in the will acting from necessity has likewise its pleasures. It disposes us to view the hearts of all the men that move our world by their power or their talents, as under the direction of a wise and good being; and it assures us that all the events that relate to our individual happiness, whether from moral or physical causes, are in his hands and that his hand is in every event.[147]

[146] Ibid., p. 30, in Riley, p. 94. As the brackets indicate, Rush crossed out the first two examples in the manuscript.

[147] "Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 441-443; Riley, p. 97.

It was necessary to believe both doctrines were true, he maintained, if only to prevent "misery and despair":

> I am aware that I dissent from two popular and rigid sects of philosophers and divines, in thus admitting the truth of the opinions held by each of them. But an exclusive belief in either of them, so far from being attended with pleasure, is calculated to excite misery and despair. I repeat, therefore, what I said formerly in speaking of the operations of the will, that both opinions appear to me to be alike true; and that we act most freely when we act most necessarily, and most necessarily when we act most freely.[148]

Rush's apparent need to believe in the union of free will and determinism was a manifestation of his tendency to oppose the monistic direction of his materialistic philosophy with the dualistic occasionalism of traditional theology. At times, a belief in the union of liberty and necessity seemed more compatible with religion to Rush than an exclusive belief in determinism, based on materialistic views. Though he felt his doctrine of materialism was not inconsistent with theology, he hinted of his awareness of its agnostic implications when he confessed, at the end of his last lecture on animal life, that he felt as if he "had waded across a rapid and dangerous stream. Whether I have gained the opposite shore with my head clean, or covered with mud and weeds, I leave wholly to your determination."[149]

[148] Ibid.; Riley, p. 97. See also Diseases of the Mind (Philadelphia, 1812), p. 263.

[149] "Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 180.

Just as often, however, Rush answered the question of human will in deterministic terms. He felt his doctrine of life provided "a striking illustration" that motives impressed upon the will determined human actions. Denying "a self determining power" in the will, he argued that "Motives are necessary not only to constitute its freedom, but its essence; for without them, there could be no more a will than there could be vision without light, or hearing without sound." To assert the freedom of the will--that an innate principle resided in man "which acted independently of external circumstances"--was to ascribe to man an attribute found only in God.[150]

Rush's Commonplace Book, 1792-1813 also revealed his denial of free will. "Man," he wrote on August 22, 1793, "is passive in animal life, volition, and salvation by Jesus Christ. Truth here prostrates pride and lays men in the dust before his [sic] Creator and Redeemer." Just as "the first impressions in the senses are deceptive," so liberty is deceptive. "By reasoning we see its fallacy." If there was "One Will only in the Universe," then the physical necessity that controlled bodily life and the moral necessity that controlled the will (and its actions) were really derived from the same source, God. Rush concluded, then, that "Moral and physical necessity" were "the same."[151]

[150] Ibid., p. 178.

[151] Autobiography, p. 299, Aug. 22, 1792. See also "Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 182.

The doctrine of necessity, Rush believed, applied not only to animal life and volition, but also to nature--nature contained no intelligent principle within itself. "By nature," he explained, ". . . I understand nothing but physical necessity. This at once excludes every thing like intelligence from her operations: these are all performed in obedience to the same laws which govern vegetation in plants and the intestine motions of fossils. They are as truly mechanical as the laws of gravitation, electricity or magnetism."[152]

On the issue of man's relationship to nature--the degree he controlled his environment--Rush was not altogether certain of the answer. Frequently, as might be expected of an 18th-century scientist, he viewed science as a manipulation of the environment to better human institutions--as a utilization of natural law in society. Though 18th-century man believed the environment exerted a powerful influence in his life, he did not preclude the possibility of modifying nature. Likewise Rush asserted that "the combined discoveries of natural history and philosophy . . . all show, that although physicians are in speculation the servants, yet in practice they are the masters of nature. The whole of their remedies seem contrived on purpose to arouse, assist, restrain, and

[152]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 273. See also "Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 174, 179.

control her operations."[153] "We live in an important era and in a new country," he told Adams. "Much good may be done by individuals, and that too in a short time."[154]

In a lecture on medical progress (1801), he contended that one of the means

> of promoting certainty in medicine, and its more extensive usefulness, is to cherish a belief, that they are both attainable and practicable. "Knowledge" it has been justly said, "is power, and philosophy, the empire of art over nature." By means of the knowledge which has lately been obtained, men now visit the upper regions of the air and the bottom of the ocean, as if they were a part of their original territory. Distance and time have likewise become subject to their power, by the invention of instruments for accelerating the communication of new and important events. Equally great, and far more interesting have been the triumphs of medicine within the last thirty years.[155]

Yet he also viewed man's connection with nature in deterministic terms. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, he wrote his wife phrases that anticipated 20th-century naturalism--"I feel as if I were in a storm at sea in an open boat without helm or compass."[156] In the last decade of his life, Rush increasingly assumed a deterministic attitude and rejected man's faltering efforts to improve his environment. "My blood circulates now too slowly through my veins to expect any change for the better

[153] Ibid., p. 275.

[154] Adams, July 2, 1788, Letters, I, 468.

[155] "The Progress of Medicine," 1801, Selected Writings, pp. 239-240.

[156] Julia Rush, Sept. 22, 1793, Letters, II, 675.

in our affairs from the exertions of an individual, however well disposed he may be to accomplish it"; ". . . do what we will to meliorate our government, . . . we cannot frustrate the designs of heaven."[157] "In thus rejecting the empire of Reason in government," he declared, "permit me to mention an empire of another kind, to which men everywhere yield a willing, and in some instances involuntary submission, and that is the EMPIRE OF HABIT. You might as well arrest the orbs of heaven in their course as suddenly change the habits of a whole people. Even in little things they resist sudden innovations upon their ancient and general customs."[158]

Rush, then, was basically a necessitarian, believing that neither life, the human will, nor physical nature was self contained but dependent upon the Will of God for its origin and continued existence. But he refused to fill the mold of a deterministic philosopher completely, not only attempting, on several occasions, to reconcile liberty and necessity but believing that man--to some extent at least--could control his environment.

[157]Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 983-984; Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1034-1035.

[158]Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 978-979.

V. Rush's Latent, Tentative Romanticism

A materialist and empiricist, Rush nevertheless occasionally showed identifiable traces of romanticism in his thinking. At such moments, he viewed nature in primitivistic terms--as a place of mystery, an escape from civilization into solitude, not as a machine of order and regularity. On other occasions, he anticipated transcendentalist notions of good and evil, and at still other times he suggested intuitive powers of the mind that seemed to transcend the limits of empirical or rational knowledge--"intellectual miracles" as he called them.[159] These occasional flashes of romanticism, of course, do not make Rush a major pre-romantic thinker, but they do add another dimension to his far-ranging mind and reveal another paradox in his philosophy: the materialistic necessitarian who speculated on the existence of some kind of innate, intuitive mental capacity.

One of the romantic touches in Rush's thought was his Rousseauistic primitivism. But to a certain extent, he modified this tendency to prefer a simple state of nature to complex civilization; he never attributed man's vices solely to the influence of civilization, nor necessarily expected to find perfection in nature. "Those who look for the simplicity and perfection of the state of nature,

[159]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 339, Aug. 8, 1811.

must seek it in systems, as absurd in philosophy, as they are delightful in poetry."[160] Rush knew that his view of the Indian's character, for example, was "contrary to that which is given by Rousseau, and several other writers, who have attempted to prove that man may become perfect and happy, without the aids of civilization and religion." The well-known facts about American savages, he felt, rendered Rousseau's theory "ridiculous."[161]

Yet Rush also noted that the refinements of civilized life increased the "number and malignity" of vices and that the Indian was characterized by his "stateliness, regularity of features, and dignity of aspect."[162] Paradoxically, in his essay, "On Manners" (1769), he outdid Rousseau in praising life in its natural state:

> There is no life so agreeable as that of the savage. It is free and independent, and in this consists the highest happiness of Man. When he is removed from it he is perpetually striving to get back to it again.
>
> The stages in society are like those in human life. A man is to be "once a man and twice a child." So it is with him in respect to Society. He is once civilized and when left to follow the bent of his inclination will never fail of becoming twice a Savage.[163]

[160]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), pp. 272, 255. See also Thomas Percival, Oct. 26, 1786, Letters, I, 404, where Rush rejected the idea that the frontier offered "the pleasures of Arcadia."

[161]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 164.

[162]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, pp. 272, 260.

[163]"On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, pp. 387-388.

". . . man," he observed in Travels Through Life, "is naturally a wild animal, and . . . taken from the woods, he is never happy in his natural state, 'till he returns to them again."[164]

Rush also revealed touches of romanticism in his descriptions of rural scenes--descriptions that emphasized the solace and peace found in nature.

> The noise of rural insects, the sight of domestic animals coming to the well to drink before they retired to rest, the purity and coolness of the air, a pleasant and frugal supper of fruit and milk . . . created for a few hours a flow of peaceful and happy feelings such as I have seldom experienced since I left the country school in which I received the first elements of my education. I forgot for a while the disputes and convulsions which now agitate our country and the globe. The principles and claims of monarchists and democrats appeared to me to partake of equal absurdity and madness. I forgot the persecutions of my enemies and felt as if I could welcome the most inveterate of them to partake of the simple fare of our little cottage.[165]

Writing of a 70-year-old farmer who was perfectly satisfied with the life of his "agricultural monastery," Rush asked, "Where is the politician or the man that has lived in the world or with the world that can make the same declaration at the same age?"[166] Agreeing with Jefferson, he considered

[164]Autobiography, p. 72. See also the touch of primitivism in his description of earlier days in Pennsylvania in "Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 287.

[165]Julia Rush, Aug. 26, 1798, Letters, II, 803.

[166]Adams, Oct. 21, 1808, Letters, II, 988.

cities "in the same light as I do abscesses on the human body, viz., as reservoirs of all the impurities of a community." "Cowper the poet," he told Jefferson, "very happily expresses our ideas of them compared with the country. 'God made the country--man made cities.'"[167] Rush, then, turned to the country for the pleasure it afforded his senses and the escape it provided from society--poses characteristic of pre-romantic and romantic writers. "I now cultivate," he wrote his friend John Montgomery,

> about twelve acres of ground two miles from our city, to which I retire two or three times a week in an afternoon to take tea with my family, and where I forget for a few hours the bustle, the sickness, the selfishness, and scandal of Philadelphia. I enjoy the songs of the little feathered tribes who jump from twig to twig over my head and sometimes peck their food at my feet. I consider them as my charge and feel the affection of a master for them. This affection will not be repaid with ingratitude, for they are unskilled in the arts of deceit and treachery. I enjoy likewise the luxuriant foliage, the fragrant flowers, and the pleasant fruit of trees planted and cultivated by my own hand. My care of them will not be repaid with persecution, for they have never grown in the city of Philadelphia. Ah! when shall I enjoy these delightful scenes without the alloy of a laborious, a distressing, and a vexatious profession?[168]

[167]Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 824. Rush has slightly altered Cowper's familiar line from The Task, 1785, I, 749: "God made the country, and man made the town."

[168]Montgomery, Aug. 5, 1801, Letters, II, 836. "To contemplate a dwelling house--a barn--stables--fields--meadows--an orchard, &c., which have been produced from original creation by the labor of a single life is, I am told, to the proprietor of them one of the highest

To Rush, then, solitude--escape from society--was an especially attractive aspect of romanticism. The moral powers, he stressed, recovered their highest place among the mental faculties "in solitude, and after sleep, hence the advantage of solitary punishments, and of consulting our morning pillow in cases where there is a doubt of what is right, or duty. The first thoughts in a morning if followed seldom deceive or mislead us. They are generally seasoned by the moral powers."[169] The main advantage of "the innocent employments of husbandry," Rush felt, was the seclusion "from the noise and corruption of the times."[170]

Though Rush ordinarily viewed nature in mechanistic terms (as a universe of physical necessity and unfailing law and order), he was occasionally struck by a sense of romantic mystery in nature. At such times, he felt that man perceived the mysteries in the works of nature "but in part."[171] The "visible appearance in nature," he believed,

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pleasures the mind of man is capable of enjoying. But how much must this pleasure be increased when the regularity of art is blended in the prospect with the wildness and antiquity of nature!" (_____, April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 552).

[169]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 185, May 27, 1790. "Many new ideas occurred to me when riding, walking, or between the times of my waking and leaving my bed in the morning" ("Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 91).

[170]Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 192. But see "Travels Through Life," p. 91: "The nature of my profession prevented my trying the effects of Solitude upon my intellectual faculties, but the few fortuitous experiments that I made, gave me no reason to expect any thing from it, for I do not recollect ever acquiring a single new idea by sitting still and doing nothing in my study."

was often deceptive.[172] "We daily tread upon mysteries in our fields or contemplate them in the woods or upon the water."[173] Man's apprehension of the world about him through his senses, then, was not always accurate, and the inscrutable in nature also served to remind him of the limitations of reason. "The great Creator has kindly established a witness of his unsearchable wisdom in every part of his works, in order to prevent our forgetting him, in the successful exercises of our reason."[174] In his essay on the moral faculty, Rush conveyed his sense of the sublime mystery of nature, in poetic terms:

> O! nature!-----Or to speak more properly,-----
> O! THOU GOD OF NATURE!-----In vain do we attempt to scan THY immensity, or to comprehend THY various modes of existence, when a single particle of light issued from THYSELF, and kindled into intelligence in the bosom of man, thus dazzles and confounds our understandings![175]

Rush's emphasis on the "economy" of nature--that is, the perfection and fitness of all things--while typical of

[172]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 227, Aug. 27, 1792. "The first impressions on the senses are deceptive, as in sounds, distance, motion of heavenly bodies, &c." (Ibid., p. 229, Aug. 22, 1793). "God reveals some truths to our senses and to our first perceptions, but many errors are conveyed into the mind through both. . . . Thus the Sun appears to our eyes to revolve around the earth. Astronomy corrects this error" (Ibid., p. 336, Dec. 21, 1809).

[173]Mary Stockton, Sept. 7, 1788, Letters, I, 484.

[174]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 176.

[175]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 208.

the age of reason, also anticipated Emerson's romantic views of the essential goodness of the universe, and of evil as the absence of good. Although Rush never denied the positive force of evil in the universe and, in fact, tended to stress it more and more after 1800, he often suggested that it was--in the long run--a means to good, and that good inevitably prevailed.[176] He felt, for example, that evil passions and thoughts were indirectly good because they provided stimuli which promoted life.[177] He tried to demonstrate in physiological terms, then, that the Fall was beneficial because it was necessary for "animal economy"--a kind of biological version of the paradox of the fortunate Fall:

> The necessity of exercise to animal life is indicated, by its being kindly imposed upon man in paradise. The change which the human body underwent by the fall, rendered the same salutary stimulus necessary to its life, in the more active form of labor. . . . In the original constitution of human nature, we were made to be stimulated by such passions and emotions only as have moral good for their objects. Man was designed to be always under the influence of hope, love, and joy. By the loss of his innocence, he has subjected himself to the dominion of passions and emotions

[176]See "Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 282; James Searle, Jan. 21, 1778, Letters, I, 189; Adams, Oct. 19, 1779, Letters, I, 242; Julia Rush, Oct. 3-4, 1793, Letters, II, 702; "1792-1813," p. 229, August 22, 1793; Nathanael Greene, April 15, 1782, Letters, I, 268; John Coakley Lettsom, April 8, 1785, Letters, I, 350; Medical Inquiries and Observations, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1815), IV, 135 (paraphrased in Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, New York, 1948, p. 264 n. 270); Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1167.

[177]"A man's evil passions help to keep him alive no less than his good ones" (Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1167).

> of a malignant nature; but they possess, in common with such as are good, a stimulus which renders them subservient to the purpose of promoting animal life.[178]

Even such "natural outlets of human life" as disease, war, and old age prevented an excess of population that might disorder the universe, eliminated tyrannical rulers and "blundering ministers" of state, and relieved "the world of old men who keep the minds of men in chains to old prejudices."[179]

Rush thought that discord and suffering were often disguised means to order and happiness. Observing that antidotes for the diseases of one country were often located in another, he concluded that this apparent inconsistency disappeared when understood as part of God's larger plan:

> Societies stand in need of each other as much as individuals: and the goodness of the Deity remains unimpeached when we suppose, that he intended medicines to serve (with other articles) to promote that knowledge, humanity, and politeness among the inhabitants of the earth, which have been so justly attributed to commerce.[180]

[178]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 141, 144-145. See Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, pp. 149-150. Boorstin suggests that for Rush "the greatest human tragedy" became "nothing but a zoology lesson" (Ibid., p. 150). Rush, however, accepted "naturalistic" and Calvinistic versions of evil as complementary. He frequently used natural history and medicine to reinforce and support orthodox doctrines as well as Scriptural revelation.

[179]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 265; Boorstin, p. 175; "1792-1813," pp. 215, 216, 1792.

[180]"Medicine Among Indians," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 282. See Boorstin, pp. 52-53.

The French Revolution, he maintained, demonstrated that "all evil is good in disguise," for it contained "nothing but the seeds of great and universal happiness."[181]

In a letter to Adams, Rush developed his theory of "universal good" by drawing upon Pope's Essay on Man:

> The divine government in this world may be compared to a dreary prospect of an extensive and highly cultivated country on a winter day. The last revolution of our globe will clothe this prospect with all the beauties of the vernal and all the products of the autumnal months. It will then appear that the apparent discord in the being and end of all intelligent and animated creatures was "Harmony not understood," and that all their sufferings were a necessary part of "universal good."[182]

He contended, then, that good was eternal and evil, short-lived. "The 'good that men do lives after them'; the evil they have done . . . generally descends into the grave with them."[183]

Recording his thoughts on the origin of evil in his commonplace book in 1791, Rush, although still in the context of orthodox theology, anticipated one of the key concepts of Emerson's transcendentalism--that evil is the absence of good. To express this principle, Rush utilized, as he so frequently did in his writings, scientific and medical analogies. Just as cold was the result of the

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[181]Griffith Evans, March 4, 1796, Letters, II, 772.

[182]Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 954-955. See Pope, Essay on Man (1773), I, 291-292.

[183]Adams, Sept. 4, 1811, Letters, II, 1100.

absence of heat, darkness the absence of light, ignorance the absence of knowledge, bodily pain and illness the absence of certain stimuli, so "may not moral evil be nothing positive, but an absence only of moral good?" This, he added, acquitted religion of the "awful charge" that God had created sin. "He only withdrew his moral omnipresence or energy from the wills of Devils and man, and sin followed." Moreover, through Christ, good would eventually fill the void. Again using a medical metaphor, Rush explained that

> Sin, like disease, is weakness. It is destroyed by power, or strength, as disease is by stimuli. Nothing is annihilated therefore in the destruction of sin. Good, in the form of power and love, fills its space. It is conveyed into the human mind by means of the holy Spirit. This Spirit expels nothing. It only restores strength to weakness and order to disorder, as stimuli cure weakness and convulsions in the human body.[184]

A favorite saying of Rush's, and one that emphasized his faith in the basic goodness and truth of all things, was that "no good effort is lost."[185] Although the good

[184]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 193, May 9, 1791.

[185]To Jeremy Belknap, Aug. 25, 1790, Letters, I, 571, Rush wrote, "Let us always remember that no good effort is lost. . . ." He wrote Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 825, "'No good effort is lost' was a favorite saying of the late Dr. Jebb. A truth cannot perish although it may sleep for centuries. The Republics of America are the fruits of the precious truths that were disseminated in the speeches and publications of the republican patriots in the British Parliament one hundred and sixty years ago." Dr. Jebb is apparently John Jebb (1736-1786), English clergyman, physician, and writer whose Works in three volumes appeared in 1787 (Letters, II, 827 n. 5).

was often hidden in an action, its truth would prevail in the long run--as he put it to James Madison:

> Truths resemble trees--some ripen in a short time, while others require half a century or more to bring them to perfection. But the seeds of the latter must be planted, as well as of the former, by somebody. To plant a forest tree, says Dr. Johnson, is the most disinterested act of benevolence a man can perform, for it is impossible for him to live long enough afterwards to enjoy any benefit from his labor. To sow the seed of a truth or of a revolution in favor of human happiness that requires many years to ripen it, is equally a mark of disinterested benevolence. The seeds of truth differ from the seeds of plants in one particular. None of them are ever lost. Like matter, they are indestructible in their very nature. They produce fruit in other ages or countries.[186]

That Rush groped toward a belief in the validity of intuitive truth, as opposed to the rational, was the most significant romantic concept in his thought. It was true that, in his lectures on animal life (1799), he rejected the theory of innate ideas and insisted on the empirical

[186] Madison, Feb. 27, 1790, Letters, I, 540-541. "Truth, though slow, is sure in its operation," he told John Coakley Lettsom. "Like spirit, it is indestructible and unquenchable in its nature. No particle of it can be lost. Sow plentifully, and a plentiful harvest will ensue. If not immediately, certainly in due time. Remember there is the same difference between seeds of truth that there is between the seeds of plants. Some are annual, some biannual, while some like the trees of the forest require half a century before they arrive at perfection" (Lettsom, Sept. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 442). Religious truth, Rush thought, was often concealed in the Scriptures. The time would come, however, when "those truths which have escaped our notice, or, if discovered, have been thought to be opposed to each other, or to be inconsistent with themselves, will then like the stones of Solomon's temple, be found so exactly to accord with each other, that they shall be cemented without noise or force, into one simple and sublime system of religion" ("The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 222).

source of all knowledge.[187] But it was equally true that in his letters, commonplace books, and essays he considered the idea that there were certain native powers of the mind not solely derived from external impressions. He wrote John Howard, the prison reformer, that no moral truth was "more self-evident" than the necessity of eliminating capital punishment.[188] He characterized John Witherspoon as one who "seemed to arrive at truth intuitively. He made use of his reasoning powers only to communicate it to others."[189] He frequently spoke of an inherent "sense of Deity" in the mind.[190] He commented on the quickness of Robert Morris' perceptions and John Adams' "most vigorous internal resources of mind."[191] He noted "that the eagle eye of genius often darts its views beyond the notice of facts. . . ."[192] He stressed that "There is a native love of truth in the human mind."[193]

[187]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 177-178.

[188]Howard, Oct. 14, 1789, Letters, I, 527.

[189]"Travels Through Life," p. 51.

[190]See "On the Utility of a Knowledge of the Faculties and Operations of the Mind to a Physician," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), p. 257; Diseases of the Mind (Philadelphia, 1812), p. 10.

[191]"Travels Through Life," p. 148; James Currie, July 26, 1796, Letters, II, 779.

[192]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 189.

[193]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 119.

Rush, however, did not exhaust his thinking on the subject with these brief considerations. Elsewhere he developed at greater length the idea of a mental perception that seemed to transcend the limitations of the senses and reason, a mental faculty that Rush never quite defined or assimilated into Lockean and Hartleian psychology.[194]

We have already noted in section II how Rush used the term fermentation to describe the reasoning process, working from empirical facts. In his autobiography, however, he used the term in a sense that suggested "intuition." Describing the development of his medical system, he reported that after much reading, thinking, and observing, "a few rays of light broke in upon my mind. . . ." The leading principle of his system "was obtruded upon me suddenly while I was walking the floor of my study. It

[194]Rush, however, was certainly not unique in accepting "self-evident" or a priori truth, for the Revolutionary Age in America, increasingly dissatisfied with Lockean epistemology, accepted as self-evident certain principles that defied scientific proof and logic. The age accepted, for example, natural rights as self-evident truths which justified rebellion against England. Thus Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, asserted that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." For a perceptive discussion of the gradual shift from rationalism to an acceptance of self-evident, intuitive truth in America from 1770 to 1830, see Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), pp. 25-28.

was like a ferment introduced into my mind. It produced in it a constant endless succession of decompositions and new arrangements of facts and ideas upon medical subjects." He also observed that the adoption of republican principles "acted like a ferment in my mind," which by producing "commotions" and a "precipitation of the feculencies of error," led him "to try the foundations" of his beliefs in education, medicine, and many other subjects. He noted too that in sickness many ideas were "obtruded upon my mind" and that teaching stimulated "new combinations in my mind."[195] David Hartley's associationism accounted for much of this, of course, but some aspects seemed to go beyond it. There was, for one thing, the idea that insight came in a "flash": "a few rays of light broke in," "obtruded upon me suddenly."[196] Moreover, the description of the processes of the mind as a fermentation producing decomposition of ideas and facts was an organic, not the usual 18th-century mechanistic, image of the mind.

Rush, therefore, was aware of the ability of the mind to apprehend knowledge beyond reason, and he speculated

[195]"Travels Through Life," pp. 87, 89, 91. "The midnight cry of 'past twelve o'clock' has often found me insensible to the cold of winter and the heat of summer while I have been engaged with ineffable delight in forming a new arrangement of facts in order to derive from them new principles and new modes of treating diseases" (Adams, Dec. 26, 1811, Letters, II, 1115).

[196]When in his lectures on animal life Rush spoke of the unrestrained, spontaneous pouring forth of the imagination, he again suggested this swiftness of perception ("Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 161).

upon this in several entries in his commonplace book. "There are intellectual as well as physical miracles," he wrote in 1811. "Whatever occurs contrary to the usual modes of acting of the understanding is a miracle."[197] In an entry in 1807 on the origin of human and divine knowledge, Rush considered the problem of knowledge from other than empirical sources--he called such "discoveries from accidents" "Revelations" or "intellectual inspiration." While maintaining that most "distinguished improvement and innovation" came from discoveries that arose "from seminal principles previously discovered" (such as the "multiplicity of languages from 24 letters of the alphabet"), he nevertheless recognized the existence of accidental discoveries, not based on fact or principle, that "should be considered as intellectual inspiration."[198] Insight through "accident," therefore, led to important truth, perhaps new "seminal principles," in science, philosophy, government, and religion. Reason was so weak and inadequate in human affairs, Rush told Adams in 1790, that much of the wisdom in government and "most of the valuable discoveries in philosophy have been the effects of accident."[199] "As in the works of nature," he noted in 1788, "discoveries

[197]"1792-1813," p. 339, Aug. 8, 1811. He referred to this as "Knowledge by inspiration" in his notes on "The Best Means of Acquiring Knowledge" (Ibid., p. 348).

[198]Ibid., p. 272, Sept. 8, 1807.

[199]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545.

have often been made by accident and by men of plain understanding without education, so truths have often been brought to light from the Bible by accident or by persons of little or no education."[200]

Rush also examined the idea that there were dormant capacities in the mind--mental powers perhaps capable of perceiving non-empirical truth. He apparently derived the concept from John Stewart, an adventurous world traveller, whose observations on the mind Rush recorded in his commonplace book:

> He said that the mind of man contained immense powers in a dormant state, and that his pursuit was to find them out by conversing with men of all countries and descriptions. Habit, education and learning, he said, had depressed the human powers. By education he did not mean the letters and sounds such as Latin and Greek taught at School, but the collision of man with man by conversation. The laborious pursuits of man, he said, depressed his intellect and reduced him to mere matter. A Buckle maker in time, he said, became a Buckle, and a Button maker a Button.[201]

[200]Mary Stockton, Sept. 7, 1788, Letters, I, 483.

[201]"1789-1791," p. 210, Oct. 7, 1791. Compare Emerson's The American Scholar: "The old fable covers a doctrine ever new and sublime; that there is One Man,--present to all particular men only partially, or through one faculty; and that you must take the whole society to find the whole man. . . . The fable implies, that the individual, to possess himself, must sometimes return from his own labor to embrace all the other laborers. But unfortunately, this original unit, this fountain of power, has been so distributed to multitudes, has been so minutely subdivided and peddled out, that it is spilled into drops, and cannot be gathered. The state of society is one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters,--a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man. Man is thus metamorphosed into a thing, into many things. The planter, who

"We are born," he wrote in 1799, "with the senses or capacities to earthly objects. May there not be similar capacities dormant in our minds to divine objects, to be opened in a future state when not opened here?"[202] Without revelation, Rush noted in his journal in 1807, "all our capacities would have been dormant. What may we not be from future Revelations--perhaps as many dormant capacities as have been evoked by Revelation."[203]

"All the faculties and propensities of the mind," he recorded in his journal, "are intended for some use. Here we know no more of them than a foetus does of its lungs, gullet, &c. before birth. All misplaced and useful passions . . . shall be employed in their supreme good."[204]

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is Man sent out into the field to gather food, is seldom cheered by any idea of the true dignity of his ministry. He sees his bushel and his cart, and nothing beyond, and sinks into the farmer, instead of Man on the farm. The tradesman scarcely ever gives an ideal worth to his work, but is ridden by the routine of his craft, and the soul is subject to dollars. The priest becomes a form; the attorney, a statute-book; the mechanic, a machine; the sailor, a rope of a ship" (The American Tradition in Literature, ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, rev. ed., New York, 1961, I, 1037).

[202]"1792-1813," p. 247, Nov. 17, 1799.

[203]Ibid., p. 272, Sept. 8, 1807.

[204]Ibid., p. 342. "The extent of the moral powers and habits in man is unknown. It is not improbable, but the human mind contains principles of virtue, which have never yet been excited into action." Pointing out the "stupendous understandings" of men like Newton and the "immeasurable flights of imagination" in Shakespeare and Milton, Rush concluded that "if the history of mankind does not furnish similar instances of the versatility and perfection of our species in virtue, it is because the moral faculty has been the subject of less culture and fewer experiments than . . . the intellectual powers of the mind" ("Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 208).

Physicians, he stressed, should observe mental diseases closely, since they often produced discoveries of secret powers of the mind; "like convulsions of the earth, which throw up metals and precious stones, they would otherwise have been unknown forever."[205] In his essay on the moral faculty, Rush expressed almost poetically the awesome mystery and complexity of the human mind:

> From a review of our subject, we are led to contemplate with admiration, the curious structure of the human mind. How distinct are the number, and yet how united! How subordinate and yet how coequal are all its faculties! How wonderful is the action of the mind upon the body! Of the body upon the mind!--And of the divine spirit upon both! What a mystery is the mind of man to itself![206]

In examining the imagination, Rush granted to it much more than the subservient role assigned to it in Lockean psychology. Locke considered it as fancy or wit, as a power of seeing resemblances, of discerning analogies between things apparently unlike, hence, the power of making poetic similes and metaphors. But it was a decidedly inferior power, Locke believed, to judgment or reason, because it was irresponsible, not caring about the "truth" or "reality" of its conceits.[207] Rush, however, like the

[205]Purnell MS. (Medical and Chirurgical Faculty Library, Baltimore), p. 50; in I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 89.

[206]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 207-208.

[207]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690), II, xi, 3; Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (Garden City, New York, 1953), p. 287. For an illuminating discussion on Locke's views on poetry and the imagination, see Willey, pp. 286-290.

romantics, valued the imaginative faculty more highly and assigned it greater powers than Locke.

Influenced by Hartley's Observations on Man, at times he viewed the imagination as associational--The imagination acts with great force upon the body, whether its numerous associations produce pleasure or pain."[208] But usually (anticipating Wordsworth and Coleridge) Rush delegated "associations of ideas and words" to a lesser faculty of the mind called fancy or "wit"--"the profane and indelicate combination of extravagant ideas"[209]--and assigned to the imagination creative, almost intuitive, powers.

In contrast to Locke, Rush tended to equate the powers of the imagination with those of the understanding. He praised the "brilliancy" of Adams' imagination as well as the "force" of his reason.[210] While "we feel a veneration bordering upon divine homage" when contemplating the "stupendous" understanding of Newton, nevertheless "our eyes grow dim, in attempting to pursue Shakspeare and Milton in their immeasurable flights of imagination."[211] Rush acknowledged that "the imagination" was one of those faculties of the mind which "act most unequivocally in

[208]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 144. According to Hartley, the imagination had only the powers of associating ideas together in categories of pleasure and pain.

[209]Benjamin Vaughan, Oct. 22, 1806, Letters, II, 932; "Duties of a Physician," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 310.

[210]Adams, June 2, 1812, Letters, II, 1137.

[211]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 208.

promoting life."[212] Accepting the influence of the imagination in curing diseases, he urged physicians therefore to avail themselves "of the aid which these powers of the mind present to us, in the strife between life and death."[213]

In discussing the concept of the imagination, Rush suggested that its powers were not altogether conditioned by external impressions, but were in part innate, mysterious, creative. "In poets the talent of rhyming," he observed, "is the result of original organization of the brain."[214] To refute the theory that the soul migrated from the body in cases of apparent death, Rush maintained it was actually the imagination that "conducts the whole mind" to heaven or hell, just as it "transports" the mind in dreams "to numerous and distant parts of the world."[215] "The effusions even of the imagination," he emphasized, ". . . are entitled to respect." They should not be considered "chimerical," for "they often become the germs of future discoveries."[216] In a brief statement in his journal in 1811, on the origin of human knowledge, he praised the creative power of genius: "The pen, the pencil, the chisel, and the brush from habit partake of the genius that directs them, and now and then

[212]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 144.

[213]"Duties," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 313.

[214]Benjamin Vaughan, Oct. 22, 1806, Letters, II, 932.

[215]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 163-164.

[216]Ibid., p. 161.

as it were involuntarily strike out beauties which were not intended by the hand that guided them, and which cannot be imitated afterwards even by their authors."[217]

Rush's concept of the moral sense was another example of how he moved toward a kind of intuitionalism in his thinking. The moral faculty, he believed, was a native, innate principle that enabled man to perceive moral truth immediately, without reflection. In his essay on "The Bible as a School Book," he denied that the Bible was God's only revelation to man. "I believe in an internal revelation, or a moral principle, which God has implanted in the heart of every man, as the precursor of his final dominion over the whole human race." Philosophers, he contended, must explore "how much this internal revelation accords with the external." He was confident, however, that Scriptural revelation was a surer path to moral truth than the internal.[218]

In his essay on The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty, Rush detailed the characteristics of the moral faculty--that "capacity in the human mind of distinguishing good and evil, or, in other words, virtue and vice."[219] Although he devoted most of the essay to a discussion of the many physical causes (such as climate,

[217]"1792-1813," p. 297, Sept. 2, 1811.

[218]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 126-127.

[219]Selected Writings, p. 181.

disease, sleep, silence, music) that influenced the moral faculty, he emphasized that it was an innate faculty of the mind apart from the senses and reason. "It is a native principle," he explained, "and though it be capable of improvement by experience and reflection, it is not derived from either of them."[220] The moral faculty, Rush warned, was not to be confused with conscience, which was "a distinct and independent capacity of the mind."[221] Comparing the two faculties, Rush stressed that the moral faculty acted with spontaneity and without deliberation:

> The moral faculty is what the schoolmen call the "regula regulans;" the conscience is their "regula regulata;" or, to speak in more modern terms, the moral faculty performs the office of a lawgiver, while the business of conscience is to perform the duty of a judge. The moral faculty is to the conscience, what taste is to the judgment, and sensation to perception. It is quick in its operations, and like the sensitive plant, acts without reflection, while conscience follows with deliberate steps, and measures all her actions by the unerring square of right and wrong.[222]

[220] Ibid. Rush quoted St. Paul's description of the moral faculty in Romans, ii, 14-15: "For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the works of the law written in their hearts, their consciences also, bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing, another" (Ibid.).

[221] Ibid. Rush felt this was evident from St. Paul's statement that the conscience accused or excused man from a breach of the law written in the heart (Ibid.).

[222] Ibid., pp. 181-182. Rush also noted that the two generally existed in exact ratio to each other, but not always. The understanding, he believed, was the seat of the conscience and the will, the seat of the moral faculty (Ibid., p. 182). This raises the question whether Rush

To Rush the "universal and essential existence of a moral faculty in the human mind" was not to be disputed. The fact that certain African tribesmen lacked moral sensibility no more invalidated the proposition than their low intelligence proved reason was not natural to the human species. Although he agreed with Locke that some savages were completely without the moral faculty, he could not agree with him that they (or man in general) originally lacked this principle.[223] Using analogical reasoning, Rush attempted to prove its universal existence:

> As well might we assert, because savages destroy their beauty by painting and cutting their faces, that the principles of taste do not exist naturally in the human mind. It is with virtue as with fire. It exists in the mind, as fire does in certain bodies, in a latent or quiescent state. As collision renders the one sensible, so education renders the other visible. It would be as absurd to maintain, because olives become agreeable to many people from habit, that we have no natural appetites for any other kind of food, as to assert that any part of the human species exist without a moral principle, because in some of them it has wanted causes to excite it into action, or has been perverted by example. There are appetites that are wholly artificial. There are tastes so entirely vitiated, as to perceive beauty in deformity. There are torpid and unnatural passions. Why, under certain unfavourable circumstances, may there not exist also a moral faculty, in a state of sleep, or subject to mistakes?[224]

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felt the moral faculty was determined since he denied the freedom of the will. The answer would seem to be yes, yet he defined the moral faculty as an independent power, not derived from experience or reason (though conditioned by them), capable of choosing good and evil.

[223] Ibid., pp. 188-189.

[224] Ibid., p. 189.

"It must afford great pleasure to the lovers of virtue," he concluded happily, "to behold the depth and extent of this moral principle in the mind."[225]

Having proved--ironically in a most rational way--that the intuitive moral faculty was universally found in the human species, Rush then contended that the moral sense, not reason or taste, was the most reliable source of moral truth and social well-being:

> Happily for the human race, the intimations of duty and the road to happiness are not left to the slow operations or doubtful inductions of reason, nor to the precarious decisions of taste. Hence we often find the moral faculty in a state of vigour in persons, in whom reason and taste exist in a weak, or in an uncultivated state. It is worthy of notice, likewise, that while second thoughts are best in matters of judgment, first thoughts are always to be preferred in matters that relate to morality. Second thoughts, in these cases, are generally parlies between duty and corrupted inclinations. Hence Rousseau has justly said, that "a well regulated moral instinct is the surest guide to happiness."[226]

Rush's concept of the moral faculty, therefore, revealed again his conviction that Locke's epistemology did not explain the origin of human knowledge adequately. Moreover, when Rush borrowed the term "moral faculty" from Beattie "because it conveys . . . the idea of a capacity in the mind of choosing good and evil" and acknowledged that the concept was much the same as Hutcheson's "moral sense," Adam Smith's "the sympathy," Rousseau's "moral instinct," and St. John's "the light that lighteth every man that

[225] Ibid., p. 190.

[226] Ibid.

cometh into the world," he aligned himself with the early proponents of Scottish common sense realism in America.[227] By accepting the idea of an innate moral sense capable of perceiving moral truth intuitively Rush, like other common sense realists, anticipated the transcendental faith in the intuition.[228]

Rush indicated his dissatisfaction with Lockean empiricism, then, by ascribing powers to the mind that transcended experience and reflection. First, he described the operation of the mind as a fermenting process. Second, he maintained that intellectual inspiration frequently led to important discoveries of principles. Third, he contended that the mind contained dormant capacities which, when properly used, enabled man to receive divine truths.

[227] Ibid., pp. 182-183.

[228] See Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830, p. 36. In his "Thoughts on Common Sense" (1791), however, Rush suggested that the term "common sense" was used "improperly to designate a faculty of the mind." Differing with Thomas Reid's definition of the term as a faculty "possessing quick and universal perception of right and wrong, of truth and error and of propriety and impropriety in human affairs," Rush defined it as "opinions and feelings in unison with the opinions and feelings of the bulk of mankind." Thus it was evident, he felt, that common sense varied "with the progress of taste, science, and religion." For example, it was contrary to common sense to favor republicanism in Europe or monarchy in America; it was contrary to common sense to use opium, bark, mercury, or the lancet, but agreeable to it to revenge public and private injuries by wars and duels. In short, "to say that a man has common sense, is to say he thinks with his age and country, in their false, as well as their true opinions" ("Thoughts on Common Sense," Essays, Literary, Moral & Philosophical, Philadelphia, 1798, pp. 249, 251-254; Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," pp. 89-90).

Fourth, he added to the associative powers of the imagination an extra dimension of creativity. Finally, he asserted that the moral faculty possessed the power to discern moral truth without the aid of the senses or reason.

His speculations about the validity of non-empirical truth, as well as his occasional remarks on primitivism, mystery in nature, and evil as illusion, revealed latent romantic tendencies in Rush's thinking which paradoxically conflicted with the fundamentally empirical and materialistic foundations of his philosophy. Rush's latent, tentative romanticism demonstrated the fecundity of a mind that refused to be bound to any one philosophical system. Though he primarily reflected 18th-century rationalistic thought, he anticipated some of the paths American thought followed during the American Renaissance.

VI. Rush's Skeptical Fideism

A persistent tendency toward Pyrrhonistic skepticism characterized Rush's philosophical thought after 1800, although Rush, because he associated libertinism and atheism with skepticism, probably would have denied it.[229] At least he revealed attitudes toward human nature, progress, and religion that were strikingly similar to those of philosophical skeptics like John Dryden and Jonathan

[229]According to Louis I. Bredvold, philosophical skepticism, not to be confused with religious unbelief, was a form of anti-rationalism based on the teachings of the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis, who taught that all knowledge is uncertain and vain and that complete indifference to all philosophical assertions is the best way to achieve intellectual felicity. The true philosophical discipline is to balance every proposition against its opposite, in order to demonstrate the uncertainty of both. Ideally, then, the philosopher, by cultivating this balance, maintained an inner tranquillity. "Naturally, such a man," Bredvold notes, "will be neither a revolutionist nor a martyr; he could never have sufficient confidence in any opinion to justify suffering inconvenience for it; he would have no reason for not conforming to the usages of society and the ritual of religion which he finds practised in his community. Pyrrho, the first great philosophical sceptic, was therefore a conformist and traditionalist in ethics, politics, and religion." As a school stressing the value of intellectual humility, Pyrrhonism was used by Montaigne, Pascal, Browne, Dryden, Swift, and others to support Christian faith and tradition against deistic rationalism and Protestant individualism. Such a conservatism was not merely a blind admiration for the status quo, but a fear that, bad as things were, they would become worse if depraved men tampered with them. An awareness of the weakness and unreliability of human nature therefore formed the basis of philosophical skepticism (Louis I. Bredvold, ed. "Introduction," The Best of Dryden, New York, 1933, pp. xxvii-xxxiv; Bredvold, The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, Ann Arbor, 1934, pp. 16-46).

Swift.[230] He exhibited, for example, the same hostility toward reason as Dryden (in Religio Laici) and Swift (in Gulliver's Travels)--he increasingly disparaged human reason and distrusted subtle, abstract speculation. Like Swift, he scornfully berated mankind for its weakness and folly which seemed to doom social progress, and stressed the value of intellectual humility. "St. Paul says we know religion but in part," Rush observed. "The same thing may be said of all subjects and every portion or atom of matter."[231]

[230]See Louis I. Bredvold, in The Intellectual Milieu of John Dryden, who discusses the skeptical and fideistic tradition of Pyrrhonism as it bears on Dryden's thought; and John A. Yunck, "The Skeptical Faith of Jonathan Swift," The Personalist, XLII (Autumn, 1961), 533-554. Swift, as one of Rush's favorite writers, influenced the physician's style as well as the satiric tone found in his work after 1790. Rush frequently cited Swift as a model for prose style. "My great partiality to Swift, Hume, Bolingbroke, and Sir W. Temple as models of fine writing," he wrote, "leads me to prefer SIMPLICITY to everything else in composition" (David Ramsay, Nov. 5, 1778, Letters, I, 219). "At 22 years of age I read Lowth's Introduction to the grammar of our language and Hume's History of England, as also some of Swift's works. By means of these authors I learned to put words together. . ." (Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 524). He recommended to his son James that "in composing letters or other things, always make choice of those words which are appropriate to the idea you wish to convey. . . . Recollect Dean Swift's definition of style. It is "proper words in their proper places'" (James Rush, March 29, 1803, Letters, II, 861. The quote is from Swift's Letter to a Young Gentleman lately Entered into Holy Orders, 1721). Swift's influence is seen in the sardonic tone of much of his correspondence, especially to John Adams, after 1790 and the satiric allegorical dreams that so delighted Adams (to Benjamin Rush, Oct. 25, 1809, Old Family Letters: Copied from the Originals for Alexander Biddle, Series A, Philadelphia, 1892, p. 246). In his journal, May 1809, Rush wrote an imitation of Swift's A Tale of a Tub, in order to ridicule the controversy on the divine origin of Episcopal and Presbyterian ordination ("Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner, Princeton, 1948, pp. 277-279, May 1809. Rush included the parody in a letter to Adams, Dec. 5, 1809, II, Letters, 1027-1028).

[231]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 335, ca. 1809.

In the manner of the philosophical skeptics, he also tended to balance opposites in his philosophical and religious views--countering necessity with liberty, monistic materialism with dualistic occasionalism, rationalism with anti-rationalism, empiricism with intuitionalism, facts with principles in the practice of medicine, and Calvinism with Arminianism. Thus one of the great reformers of the Revolutionary Age in America finally doubted the efficacy of social amelioration--through human efforts, certainly.

A belief in fideism was another characteristic of traditional skepticism that Rush displayed in his thought during the last decade of his life.[232] Returning to his youthful religiosity, he increasingly argued for the primacy of Christian faith over reason and science in achieving social well-being. His utopian vision, moreover, gradually shifted from an earthly and immediate to a heavenly and far distant millennium. Yet a paradox existed in Rush's fideistic anti-rationalism, for few ever urged fideism and attacked reason more rationally. His logical, rational bent of mind recalls Swift and Dryden again. T. Wedel's description of Swift as "a rationalist with no faith in reason" applies to Rush as well.[233] "The rationalist who distrusts reason may

[232]Professor Yunck defines "fideism" as a "religious belief which grows out of a deeply felt recognition of the limitations of the human instruments of knowledge and reason, without rejecting the validity of reason within limitations" (Yunck, "The Skeptical Faith of Jonathan Swift," p. 552 n. 4). On fideism, see Bredvold, pp. 29-43; 73-129.

[233]T. Wedel, "On the Philosophical Backgrounds of Gulliver's Travels," Studies in Philology, XXIII (1926), 450; quoted in Yunck, p. 537.

have been a rare paradox in the eighteenth century," Yunck notes, "but he was common in Christian tradition."[234] Rush the philosophical materialist, therefore, also became the skeptical fideist.

In 1800 Rush recorded in his autobiography that his conversion to Republicanism produced his skeptical frame of mind:

> This great and active truth became a ferment in my mind. I now suspected error in every thing I had been taught, or believed, and as far as I was able began to try the foundations of my opinions upon many other subjects. The sequel of my scepticism and investigations will appear hereafter. It has been said that there is no such thing as a solitary error in the human mind. The same may be said of truths. They are all related, and delight in Society.[235]

Nonetheless, because Rush was hostile to the atheistic implications of skepticism, he deplored the irreligious influence of La Rochefoucauld's Maxims and admired Beattie's refutation of Hume's skeptical doctrines.[236] Though the libertine skepticism of men like La Rochefoucauld, Rochester, and Hume appraised human nature as severely as Augustinian and Calvinistic theologians, its secular spirit was quite alien to the fideistic strain of skepticism found in Rush's thought.

[234]Yunck, p. 549. Pascal, for example, was a fideist who revealed this paradox. See Bredvold, pp. 37-40.

[235]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 46.

[236]"1792-1813," p. 316, June 5, 1809; Letters, I, 394 n. 1; James Kidd, November 25, 1793, Letters, II, 746-747. "Reverberate over and over my love to Dr. Beattie," he wrote Kidd. "I cannot think of him without fancying that I see Mr. Hume prostrate at his feet. He was the David who slew that giant of infidelity" (Kidd, May 13, 1794, Letters, II, 748).

A denigration of human reason was a characteristic of skepticism quite discernible in Rush's thinking. In the years before 1800 he valued reason highly. One of the goals of America, he emphasized in 1788, was "to exalt the human understanding."[237] Such was the power of reason, he believed, that it might eventually eradicate all evil in the world.[238] But even in the 1780's and 90's he began to suspect its lack of effectiveness in improving society. "Happily for the human race," he maintained in 1786, "the intimations of duty and the road to happiness are not left to the slow operations or doubtful inductions of reason," but rather to the dictates of the moral faculty.[239] "The influence of the imagination and passions, upon the understanding in its researches after truth," Rush observed in 1791, often led men to support errors zealously.[240] In

[237]"To Friends of the Federal Government," Oct. 29, 1788, Letters, I, 495.

[238]John R. B. Rodgers, June 25, 1795, Letters, II, 762.

[239]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 190. One of the limitations of reason, he noted in 1791, was that it "acquires truth too slowly to act with effect . . ." ("Observations and Reasoning in Medicine," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 246). Rush told Jeremy Belknap in 1789 that "Human reason has been employed in vain" to eliminate spirituous liquors (Belknap, July 13, 1789, Letters, I, 520).

[240]"Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 246-247. In morality, reasoned inductions "are generally parlies between duty and corrupted inclinations" ("Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 190).

a letter to Adams in 1790, Rush catalogued the deficiencies of human reason:

> Had the King of Prussia never said nor wrote [sic] another sentence than the one you have quoted from him upon human reason, he would have deserved the high rank he holds among philosophers and kings. Mr. Boyle has expressed the same idea but with much less force. "We are governed," says this great man, "by our prejudices, and not by our reason." What did reason do in the council or the field in the last American war? Were not most of the wise measures of Congress the effects of passion, accident, or necessity, and were not all the successful movements or engagements of our army little else than lucky blunders? Most of the valuable discoveries in philosophy have been the effects of accident. This is eminently the case in medicine. We owe more to quacks, who never reason, for useful and powerful articles in the materia medica, than to the learning of M.D.'s.[241]

Frederick II's maxim, "La Raison n'a jamais fait grande chose," became, then, one of Rush's favorite sayings.[242]

After 1800 Rush's scorn for human reason acquired Swift's bitter tones. Half the people in Europe and America,

[241]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545. "Frederick the 2nd asks in his Seven Years War, 'What did human reason ever do great in human affairs?' Where great events are brought about apparently by human reason, men are often I believe prompted to accomplish them by motives that are contrary to right reason. I am led to make this remark by recollecting the absurd and frivolous reasons which were given by many of our patriots in 1776 for concurring in the separation of our country from G. Britain. . . . Indeed we were conducted with our eyes obliquely directed, and backwards, in spite of ourselves, to the haven of peace and independence. We are the causes of our own misery in most cases, but our happiness came to be forced upon us by the kind and invisible hand of heaven" (Adams, July 11, 1806, Letters, II, 924).

[242]Letters, I, 547 n. 2.

he observed in 1801, were "contending for a new disorder of things, that is, . . . for the empire of intoxicated human reason in the affairs of the world."[243] In a Swiftian satire in which Rush imagined himself, as President, failing to eliminate spirituous liquors, he concluded with a devastating attack on reason:

> "Hold, sir," said I. "You don't know the people of the United States as well as I do; they will submit to the empire of Reason, and Reason will soon reconcile them to the restrictions and privations of the law for sobering and moralizing our citizens."
> "Reason! Reason! Mr. President. Why, you forget that it was Reason in the form of a Goddess that produced all the crimes and calamities of the French Revolution, and that it was by a book entitled The Age of Reason that Tom Paine demoralized half the Christian world. You forget too that men are rational only, not reasonable creatures. Have you never read the Posthumous Works of Frederick the II of Prussia? You will there find that great statesman as well as warrior say, 'Reason never did any great in human affairs.' And have you never read the story of an Englishman who was so dissatisfied with the expenses and follies of the British government, in which everything was conducted by passion, that he set out to visit a country in Asia known by the name of the kingdom of Reason. Upon being introduced to the prime minister of the king, he told him he had come from a great distance to do homage to a government and a people that were governed wholly by reason, and that he intended to end his days among them. '0! sir,' said the minister, 'you will repent the exchange you have made of your country for ours. In your country, we are told, men who have lost an arm or a leg in a battle think themselves amply rewarded for their

[243]John Montgomery, Aug. 5, 1801, Letters, II, 838. To Rush, religious infidelity was a natural vice of the human understanding ("The Vices and Virtues of Physicians," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 294).

> misfortune by having a blue or red ribbon hung over their shoulders, or the trifling monosyllables Sir or Lord attached to their names; but in our country our generals and officers laugh at those baubles and demand reasonable rewards for their services and sacrifices of their limbs, and these consist in large and splendid houses, extensive tracts of land, and pensions of many thousand pounds a year, by which our country is broken down and ruined by taxes, and instead of being the happiest, we are the most miserable nation upon the face of the earth.'"[244]

A few months before his death Rush summarized what experience taught him about the human understanding: "I have been educated in the unbelief . . . of the omnipotence of human reason. . . ."[245]

Like Swift, Rush knew that, as a weak, foolish, irrational creature whose actions constantly demonstrated the truth of the Fall, man himself was the chief obstacle to progress, and like Swift, he grounded his anti-rationalism on human depravity, one of the basic tenets of Augustinian and Calvinistic Christianity.[246] "If mankind," Rush wrote Adams in 1808, "will prefer a monarchy to a republic,

[244]Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 978.

[245]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171. Among the causes of mental disease, Rush listed the efforts to produce "perfect order and happiness in morals and government, by the operations of human reason" (Diseases of the Mind, Philadelphia, 1812, p. 36, in Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen, 1746-1813, Philadelphia, 1934, p. 261).

[246]Yunck, p. 542. Yunck observes that Swift, in his deprecation of human nature, "was out of touch not with Christian doctrine but with the world around him: the deists, the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, even Locke" (Ibid.).

commerce and war to an embargo, and drams, slings, grog, and toddy to the wholesome liquors [such as water and beer] . . . , I can only testify my sorrow for the depravity of their political, moral, and physical inclinations by weeping over their folly and madness."[247] "But enough of great men!" he declared to Adams, in speaking of Washington, "--especially to one who has ceased to believe in them from knowing so well how much littleness is mixed with human greatness, how much folly with human wisdom, and how much vice with the greatest attainments in human virtues."[248] Rush, then, knew well man's tendency to create a "breach in the symmetry of the divine government": "It is peculiar to man, to divide what was intended by the Author of nature to be indivisible. Religion and morals, government and liberty, nay, even reason and the senses, so happily paired by the Creator of the world, . . . have each been disunited by the caprice and folly of man."[249]

[247]Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 979.

[248]Adams, Oct. 1 , 1807, Letters, II, 953.

[249]"Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 247. Ingratitude for benevolence was understandable, Rush reminded Jefferson, if one considered "mankind as Solomon considered them several thousand years ago, viz., as laboring under madness" (Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 825). "The Scriptures speak of nations being drunk and of all the individuals of the human race being mad" (Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 984-985). "We are advised to eat onions in order to prevent our being offended with the breath of persons who have eaten them. Is there no method of infecting persons with madness in order to prevent their being offended and distressed with the madness of their friends

Though Rush engaged actively in political, social, economic, and religious reform, advocating mental health, free public education, abolition, temperance, elimination of capital punishment, pacifism, medical aid to the poor, and trade unions, his skeptical awareness of human corruption and irrational behavior gradually dimmed his humanitarian fervor. His disillusion was apparent in 1788 when he wrote Jeremy Belknap that "Ever since I was one-and-twenty years of age, I have unfortunately been engaged in combating vulgar errors or popular prejudices."[250] ". . . I know by experience as well as observation," he wrote in his autobiography, "that an indiscreet zeal for truth, justice, or humanity has cost more to the persons who have exercised it, than the total want of zeal for any thing good, or even zeal in false and unjust pursuits."[251] "We often hear of 'prisoners at large,'" he told Adams in 1811. "The majority of mankind are madmen at large. They differ in their degrees of insanity, but I have sometimes thought the most prominent in this general mental disease are those men who by writing and reasoning attempt to cure

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and the public? Nat. Lee the poet was asked in a cell in Bethlehem hospital 'what brought him there.' He answered, 'He had said the world was mad, but that the world had said the same thing of him, and that he had been outvoted.' Do and say what we will, we shall I fear always be outvoted by the fools and knaves and madmen of our country" (Adams, March 2, 1809, Letters, II, 997).

[250]Belknap, Aug. 19, 1788, Letters, I, 481.

[251]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 82.

them."[252] Thus Rush replaced his hopes for a healthy society with the charge that America was rapidly becoming socially insane.

Rush's skeptical disillusion with humanitarian reform, therefore, eventually engulfed his greater vision of the American mission. During the Revolution and the succeeding years, Rush was preoccupied with the theme of America's future greatness--the vision of the new nation as a beacon to liberty and happiness, as "the theater on which human nature will reach its greatest civil, literary, and religious honors."[253] But as the years passed, he increasingly saw this vision in terms of the distant future rather than of his own times, something to be hoped for, perhaps never realized. As he wrote Adams, ". . . let us console ourselves with the hope that our labors (like the conversations of the people in winter at the North Pole described by Mr.

[252]Adams, July 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1090. Rush included Adams "among the men who were so preeminent in madness as to undertake the cure of the madness of mankind by appeals to their reason. I have been a fellow laborer with you in this irrational business. But we will console ourselves with the comfortable reflection that we have aimed well. Were we to live our lives over again and engage in the same benevolent enterprize, our means should be not reasoning but bleeding, purging, low diet, and the tranquillizing chair" (Adams, Aug. 6, 1811, Letters, II, 1092).

[253]Adams, July 2, 1788, Letters, I, 468-469. Perhaps Rush's most ecstatic vision of America's mission appeared in his address on "Medicine Among the Indians of North America," (1774, Selected Writings, pp. 290-292), but from 1774 to 1792 he constantly reiterated the concept in his essays, lectures, and letters.

Addison, which froze as they came out of their mouths and thawed in the spring) will in like manner be thawed by time and produce the fruits in knowledge and happiness in centuries to come."[254]

Moreover, Rush's increasingly skeptical view of man's weak, vacillating nature led him to place less faith in the efforts of individuals and more in heavenly providence, in his dream of a great society. He no longer expected "any change for the better in our affairs from the exertions of an individual, however well disposed he may be to accomplish it."[255] He was certain, he told Adams, that "For wise purposes it has pleased God to conceal from us the precise times in which the prophecies are to be accomplished. The attempts of bad men to defeat them and of good men to accelerate them would probably have increased in a great degree the miseries of our world from human ambition and folly."[256] Since human institutions failed to improve the human condition, Rush concluded that mankind's only hope was fideistic--a faith in a new millennial order of things to come:

> Never perhaps was there a time in which there was more to fear from the wickedness and folly, and less to hope from the virtue and wisdom, of man. A newspaper, once the vehicle of pleasing and useful intelligence, is now the

[254]Adams, Sept. 22, 1808, Letters, II, 985.

[255]Ibid., II, 983-984.

[256]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993.

> sad record only of misery and crimes. All systems of political order and happiness seem of late years to have disappointed their founders and advocates. Civilization, science, and commerce have long ago failed in their attempts to improve the condition of mankind, and even liberty itself, from which more was expected than from all other human means, has lately appeared to be insufficient for that purpose. . . . My only hope for suffering and depressed humanity is derived from a belief in a new and divine order of things which we are told will be introduced into our world by the influence of the gospel upon individuals and nations. It was predicted of the Messiah that he would be "the desire of all nations." Should the present system of violence and subjugation of the nations continue, that prophecy must soon be fulfilled, for I believe there is at this time scarcely a nation upon the face of the earth that is satisfied with its government or its rulers and that would not exchange both for others, though probably, in their present state of ignorance, not for the government of the future King of Saints and Nations. A few more years of suffering will probably bring about the fulfillment of the prophecy and render him indeed the "desire of all nations."[257]

At other times Rush pessimistically rejected his utopian hopes for America altogether. In cataloguing the political, social, and economic corruption of a "bedollared nation," Rush remarked bitterly to Adams that "I feel pain when I am reminded of my exertions in the cause of what we called liberty, and sometimes wish I could erase my name from the Declaration of Independence."[258] As his vision of the American mission faded, he developed a scorn as devastating

[257]Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

[258]Adams, June 13, 1808, Letters, II, 966. In his reply, Adams rebuked Rush for this remark (Old Family Letters, A, p. 184).

as Swift's--as seen in this "epitaph" on American liberties:

> Here lie interred
> the liberties of the United States.
> They were purchased with much treasure and blood, and by uncommon exertions of talents and virtues. Their dissolution was brought on by the cheapness of suffrage in some of the states, by a funding system which begat banks and lotteries and land speculations, and by the removal of Congress to the city of Washington, a place so unfriendly to health, society, and instructing intercourse, and so calculated to foster party and malignant passions, that wise and good men considered a seat in it as a kind of banishment, in consequence of which the government fell into the hands of the young and ignorant and needy part of the community, and hence the loss of the respect and obedience due to laws, and hence one of the causes of the downfall of the last and only free country in the world.[259]

In a final ironical gesture at reform, Rush suggested satirically that medical remedies might "cure" the nation's maladies:

> The remedies for a yellow fever would do wonders with the heads of the men who now move our world. Ten and ten (as our dose of calomel and jalap were called in 1793) would be a substitute for a fistula in the bowels of Bonaparte. Bleeding would probably lessen the rage for altering the Constitution of Pennsylvania in the

[259]Adams, Oct. 2, 1810, Letters, II, 1067-1068. In a letter to Adams in 1812, Rush asked, "Would it not have been more correct, and more in unison with our habits and principles, had Congress instead of declaring war sent an advertisement to be published in all the newspapers in Europe drawn up in some such form as the following? 'For Sale to the highest bidder. The United States of America. Terms of payment--A bank in every village in the country composed of five houses, and a dozen in every city; commerce with the whole world; a whiskey distillery on every farm; and a charter conveying to the whole nation and to every individual in it the title of "Disciples of Washington." Inquire of Messrs. _____ in Boston and of Messrs. _____ in New York and Philadelphia'" (Adams, July 18, 1812, Letters, II, 1154).

> leaders of the party who are now contending for that measure. Tonics might be useful to those persons who behold with timidity the insults and spoliations that are offered to our commerce. The cold bath might cure the peevish irritability of some of the members of our Congress, and blisters and mustard plasters rouse the apathy of others. In short, there is a great field opened for new means of curing moral and political maladies. The common remedies for that purpose, that is, Reason and Ridicule, have been used in vain.[260]

Even a metaphor of bodily corruption could not express fully the disgust evoked in Rush by the bitter fruits of the Revolution: "A field of battle covered with dead bodies putrefying the open air is an awful and distressing spectacle, but a nation debased by the love of money and exhibiting all the vices and crimes usually connected with that passion, is a spectacle far more awful, distressing and offensive."[261] The only consolation for the patriot, perhaps, was a reward

[260]Adams, Nov. 25, 1806, Letters, II, 935. This bit of vigorous satire was inspired by Swift's A Tale of a Tub, which Rush had recently read "with a pleasure which I was incapable of relishing and with an application to particular characters to which I was a stranger when a boy" (Ibid.).

[261]Jefferson, Mar. 15, 1813, Letters, II, 1189. "From the present complexion of affairs in our country," he wrote Jefferson, "are you not disposed at times to repent of your solicitude and labors and sacrifices during our Revolutionary struggle for liberty and independence? Have you not been disappointed in the conduct of both tories and whigs? Have not the former increased in number, not only by population but by the accession of Englishmen and the apostasy of many Revolutionary whigs? Are not the sons of tories Nerone Neronior [More Nero-like than Nero]? Have not our funding system and its offspring, banks, like so many Delilahs robbed the whigs of their Revolutionary strength and virtue?" (Ibid.).

in "another and a better world."[262]

The fideism implicit in Rush's disillusion with the mission of America eventually led him to prefer Christianity to human reason as a means to individual and social happiness. Christianity, not reason, would restore to the mind what it forfeited in the Fall:

> . . . the time we are assured will come, when the understanding shall be elevated from its present inferior objects, and the luxated passions be reduced to their original order.--This change in the mind of man, I believe, will be effected only by the influence of the Christian religion, after all the efforts of human reason to produce it, by means of civilization, philosophy, liberty, and government, have been exhausted to no purpose.[263]

[262]Adams, April 1, 1809, Letters, II, 1002. "Are the labors and virtues of the patriots and heroes of 1774, 1775, and 1776 to perish without bringing forth any other fruit than what we have gathered from the transient duration of our general government? Or are their sleepless nights, their midnight addresses to the power and justice of Heaven for their oppressed and injured country, their sacrifices of time and property, and their 'cruel mockings' (often worse than bodily sufferings) to be rewarded only in 'another and a better world'? Let us believe "------- the firm patriot there,/ Who made the welfare of mankind his care,/ Though here with envy and with faction tost,/ Shall find the generous labor was not lost" (Ibid.). Rush's modification of a favorite saying that liberty was not a shadow but a substance symbolized his lost faith in human-motivated progress: "O Liberty! liberty! I have worshipped thee as a substance.--But--but--but--'Where are my shoes and stockings?'--Where is my lancet?--Where are my gallipots?" (Ibid., II, 1001).

[263]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 171. Christianity, Rush observed, enlightened, directed, regulated man's judgment, will, passions "in the knowledge--choice--and pursuit of duty--truth and interest"; it "restores us to what the apostle very emphatically calls 'a sound mind'" ("On the Different Species of Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 219).

Christianity alone, he declared to Noah Webster, produced social well-being and truth:

> . . . I fear all our attempts to produce political happiness by the solitary influence of human reason will be as fruitless as the search for the philosopher's stone. It seems to be reserved to Christianity alone to produce universal, moral, political, and physical happiness. Reason produces, it is true, great and polar truths, but it affords motives too feeble to induce mankind to act agreeably to them. Christianity unfolds the same truths and accompanies them with motives, agreeable, powerful, and irresistible.[264]

Comparing scriptural revelation with reason and natural revelation--the foundation for deism--Rush concluded that "everything good in man, and all his knowledge of God and a future state, are derived wholly from scattered and traditional rays of the successive revelations recorded in the Bible. Without them, men would have been elevated above beasts of prey only in wickedness and misery."[265]

Rush's acceptance of mystery in religion also illustrated his fideism. Like Swift, he believed some religious matters defied the subtleties of rationalistic, scientific demonstration--they were to be accepted on faith:

> We believe without attempting to explain the Mystery of the Trinity. Why believe Three in

[264]Webster, July 20, 1798, Letters, II, 799. See also Jeremy Belknap, July 13, 1789, Letters, I, 520.

[265]Ashbel Green, Dec. 9, 1802, Letters, II, 854. ". . . human reason alone in its most cultivated state," Rush maintained, "will not make men free or happy without the aid of divine revelation and the influences of the Spirit of the Gospel upon the hearts of men" (James Kidd, Nov. 25, 1793, Letters, II, 740).

> One and not believe the derived and the independent life of our Saviour, His being raised from the grave by his Father, and being the Author of His own resurrection--the Union of liberty and necessity, and the agency of divine and human efforts in bringing about the Salvation of the soul. They all appear to be true, though opposed to each other. They are like the Trinity--mysteries intelligible only, perhaps to the Creator.[266]

Moral behavior did not require deep theoretical knowledge of religion. Since the most unintelligent of men could cultivate grain and the most ignorant of women could learn to make bread, the Creator clearly would not have required, Rush noted, a subtle mind to support moral conduct. "Truth is simple upon all subjects," he stressed, "but upon those which are essential to the general happiness of mankind, it is obvious to the meanest capacities."[267]

In addition, Rush's rejection of a belief in America as an empire of science and reason in favor of a hope for a spiritual and temporal Christian millennium demonstrated the fideistic anti-rationalism of his last years. This shift was discernible as early as 1787 when he wrote the English reformer John Coakley Lettsom that he had "sometimes been led . . . to suspect that the melioration of our world is to be brought about not so much by the improvements of human reason as by a faithful imitation of the example

[266]"1792-1813," p. 340. See Yunck's commentary (pp. 547-549) on Swift's sermon on the Trinity. See also "The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 125.

[267]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 154, 277 n. 45; "Observations and Reasoning," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 236.

of our Saviour and a general obedience to the plain and humble precepts of the Gospel."[268] The way he expressed the same idea to Adams in 1809 suggested how far he had traveled down the path toward fideism. Since the failure of the union, he wrote, had dashed the "only surviving hopes of mankind" through the agency of reason, "it would seem as if the history of our country would furnish new proofs that men are to be governed only by the Bible or the bayonet."[269]

Though Rush wrote Elhanan Winchester in 1791 that "the progress of reason and liberty in Europe" announced the approach of the millennium, he gradually accepted the notion of the necessity of a long preparation for Christ's Second Coming.[270] As he wrote John Montgomery,

> The affairs of the Old World are still in a state of great disorder. Many pious people expect we are upon the eve of the millennium. I am not of that opinion. There is a great deal of preparatory work to be done before that event can take place, and which will probably be brought about by natural means. Civilization, human knowledge, and liberty must first pervade the globe. They are the heralds of religion. They do not confer happiness, but they prepare the minds of mankind for it. From the present general prevalence of barbarism, ignorance, and slavery in the world, it would seem that a century or more would

[268]Lettsom, Sept. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 441. To Ashbel Green, Rush spoke of "the Redeemer's new empire in America" (Green, Aug. 11, 1787, Letters, I, 434).

[269]Adams, April 1, 1809, Letters, II, 1002.

[270]Winchester, Nov. 12, 1791, Letters, I, 611-612.

> be necessary to remove them. In the meanwhile, Christians should endeavor to cultivate the peaceful dispositions which the millennium is to introduce into the mind, and daily repeat in their prayers, "Thy kingdom come."[271]

In another letter to Montgomery, Rush described the main outlines of his millennial faith--especially its anti-rationalism and its futurity.[272] Reviewing church history, he found that religious men in every age expected the Messiah's Second Coming to be near in times of distress from plagues and wars. Much had to be completed, however, before "that great event" could take place. Knowledge, for example, had to become "universal," but not to create a rationalistic utopia--its effect would be quite the opposite:

> The effects of this knowledge will be to produce revolutions, liberty, a general intercourse of all nations by means of commerce, and--be not surprised when I add--universal misery. The more nations and individuals know, till they know God, the more unhappy will they be. The effects of this unhappiness in nations and individuals will appear in a general dissatisfaction with their governments (though the work of their own hands), with each other, and with themselves. Injustice, vice, and tyranny will prevail everywhere. Then and not till then will all nations, worn down by their sufferings, unite in wishing for a Deliverer, and then and not till then will "the DESIRE of all nations come." Millions, nay all the inhabitants of our world, will hail his descent to our globe and unanimously commit its government wholly to him.

Men, Rush continued, also had to learn to "wait with patience

[271]Montgomery, June 6, 1801, Letters, II, 834.

[272]Montgomery, Aug. 5, 1801, Letters, II, 837-838.

for the fulfilment of all God's promises." As the Scriptures prophesied, kings, secular priests, and despots must fall. "The Messiah alone shall reign. . . . All will end, not only well, but gloriously for those who believe and trust in his name." But first must pass not only the "ancient disorder" of "putrefying civil and eclessiastical institutions," but the "new disorder" of governments that "exclude religion"--"the empire of intoxicated human reason in the affairs of the world."

Rush's skepticism, then, led him to attack reason, scold mankind for its weakness and folly, and reject human efforts toward a perfect society. His fideism was revealed in his final preference for Christianity as a means to social happiness, his acceptance of religious mystery, and his abiding faith in a heavenly utopia on earth--through God's agency alone. Yet, like Swift's, his skepticism was not total; he did not attack right reason itself so much as man's pitiful lack of it.[273] Ideally, religion and reason were not incompatible, for as Rush expressed it, "the light of the gospel" and "sound and cultivated reason . . . . are in no one instance opposed to each other. On the contrary, reason is nothing but imperfect

[273]See Yunck, p. 549. Swift, in his sermon on the Trinity, observed that "Reason itself is true and just, but the Reason of every particular Man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his Interests, his Passions, and his Vices" (Ibid., p. 548).

religion, and religion is nothing but perfect reason."[274] But unfortunately, he observed, we have "'. . . to bear with the unreasonableness of mankind.' Men love royalty, titles. . . . They make wars, enslave their fellow creatures, distill and drink rum, all because they are not formed by REASON."[275] "Thus we are forced," he concluded, "to submit to Dean Swift's definition of our species. We are 'capax rationis,' not reasoning animals."[276]

One of the sources of the deep religious fideism of Rush's last years, then, was philosophical skepticism, the Christian Pyrrhonism of Montaigne, Pascal, Dryden, and Swift. It was a skeptical faith that perhaps enabled Rush to bridge the gap between his humanitarianism and his disillusionment with social reform, his love of mankind

[274]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 46. In considering why he preferred the use of Christ's teachings to reason in improving society, he noted that the "brightest improvement" of reason "consists in obeying the doctrines and . . . the precepts of the Christian religion" (John Coakley Lettsom, Sept. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 441).

[275]Adams, July 21, 1789, Letters, I, 525.

[276]Noah Webster, Dec. 9, 1800, Letters, II, 828. "You forget too that men are rational only, not reasonable creatures" (Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 978). In Swift's famous letter to Alexander Pope in 1725, he wrote: "I have got materials toward a treatise, proving the falsity of that definition animal rationale, and to show it would be only rationis capax. Upon this great foundation of misanthropy, though not in Timon's manner, the whole building of my Travels is erected; and I never will have peace of mind till all honest men are of my opinion" (to Pope, Sept. 29, 1725, Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels and other Writings, ed. Louis A. Landa, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, p. 494).

and his awareness of human depravity. In the ashes of America as an empire of reason and science, he was able to build a vision of the heavenly city of God. The scientific rationalist became the fideist.

The most significant aspect of Rush's developing skepticism was the irony implicit in his repudiation of much he had formerly stood for. In believing that rational men, by applying the principles of science, would create the perfect society, the young humanitarian reformer epitomized the optimism of the Enlightenment. Yet, ironically, he gradually lost faith in the possibility of rational action from men controlled by "depraved" passions, slowly turned to a skeptical faith, and finally rejected the rationalist's utopia in favor of a divine millennium. In the end, Christianity remained as the only trustworthy guide to human happiness; only God could make things better.

CHAPTER III: BENJAMIN RUSH'S RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

I. Introduction

Rush, raised a Presbyterian, grew to maturity within the doctrines of orthodox Calvinism. His mother attended Rev. Gilbert Tennent's Presbyterian church in Philadelphia and, as Rush reported in his autobiography, "educated all her children in the principles taught by him, which were highly calvinistical."[1] At Rev. Samuel Finley's school, West Nottingham Academy, 1753-1759, he was "fully instructed" in the principles of Calvinism "by means of the Westminster Catechism."[2]

Rush remained a member of the Second Church until 1787, when his growing antipathy to many of the tenets of Calvinism and a series of political quarrels with Dr. John Ewing led him to resign his membership.[3] Confirmed in St. Peter's

[1]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 163. Tennent (1703-1764) was a leader of the evangelistic "New Lights" that broke with the Old Light Presbyterians in 1741. He formed the Second Church in Philadelphia in 1743 and remained its pastor until his death. Rush's first known publication was a passionate Funeral Eulogy . . . of the Late Reverend Gilbert Tennent. . . , appended to Samuel Finley's official eulogy, The Successful Minister of Christ Distinguished in Glory, Philadelphia: Bradford, 1764 (Ibid., p. 163 n. 12; Letters, I, 23 n. 3).

[2]Ibid., pp. 28-29 n. 23, 163. Finley, a leader of the Whitefield wing of Presbyterians, was later president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University). Rush paid a tribute to Finley in his autobiography (Ibid., pp. 29-31).

[3]Ashbel Green, Aug. 11, 1787, Letters, I, 433-434,

Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in February 1788, he left "a year or two later" because the doctrines congenial to his developing liberalism in theology, he felt, were reversed in the revised Prayer Book adopted by the Protestant Episcopal Church of America in 1789. Thereafter he attended Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Universalist churches without affiliating with any of them.[4]

After 1780 Rush moved in the direction of Universalism, but, as his letters show, he maintained Presbyterian views until his breach with the Second Church in 1787.[5] In Travels Through Life, he described the evolution of his religious liberalism:

> I retained them [Calvinistic principles] but without any affection for them 'till about the year 1780. I then read for the first time Fletcher's controversy with the Calvinists in favor of the Universality of the atonement. This prepared my mind to admit the doctrine of Universal salvation, which was then preached in our city by the Revd.

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435 n. 1; John Montgomery, Feb. 20, 1786, Letters, I, 379-380; "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 165. Rush disliked Ewing intensely, viewing him as an embodiment of all the evils of the Pennsylvania Radicals. The fight between them was so notorious that Francis Hopkinson published a skit on it in 1785 (Letters, I, 297 n. 3). For Rush's version of the controversy, see Adams, Feb. 24, 1790, Letters, I, 532-534; Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 962).

[4]"Travels Through Life," p. 165, 165 n. 17. See also Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 962: "I took refuge in the Episcopal Church," which "at that time had divested itself of many of its absurdities in doctrine and worship." "In consequence of an alteration made in the forms of Baptism and the communion service, the former admitting infant regeneration, and the latter favouring transubstantiation, I declined after a year or two communing in the church. . . " ("Travels Through Life," p. 165).

[5]Ibid., p. 163 n. 14.

> Mr. Winchester. It embraced and reconciled my ancient calvinistical, and my newly adopted Armenian [sic] principles. From that time I have never doubted upon the subject of the salvation of all men.[6]

Accepting the doctrine of final restitution, Rush became perhaps the first prominent layman to support the Universalist Church actively. Though he never officially joined the denomination, he took part in its first convention in Philadelphia in June 1790. By request, he arranged and corrected the plan of polity and articles of religion drafted by the convention.[7]

[6]Ibid., p. 163. John William Fletcher (1729-1785), one of the founders of Methodism, wrote several tracts on salvation and predestination (Ibid., p. 163 n. 13). Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797), though originally a strict Calvinist, became convinced of the doctrine of universal salvation. With John Murray, Winchester founded the Universalist Church in America (Ibid., p. 163 n. 14; Letters, I, 372-373 n. 7). Rush described Winchester as "a theological Newton" (Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson, Jan. 18, 1793, Letters, II, 628), and "eloquent, Scriptural, and irresistible in his reasonings upon all subjects" (Griffith Evans, March 4, 1796, Letters, II, 773). Rush noted in his autobiography that he was convinced of the doctrine of universalism by reading the works of James Stonehouse, Paul Siegvolk (assumed name of George Klein Nicolai, a German religious writer), Jeremiah White, Charles Chauncey, and Winchester, and "afterwards from an attentive perusal of the Scriptures" ("Travels Through Life," pp. 163-164). Stonehouse published Universal Restitution (1761); Siegvolk, The Everlasting Gospel, English translation (1753); White, The Restitution of All Things (1712); Chauncey, a tract and two books on universal salvation from 1782 to 1784 (Ibid., p. 164 n. 15).

[7]Ibid., p. 164 n. 14; "Commonplace Book, 1789-1891," Autobiography, p. 185, June 5, 1790. See Richard Price, Oct. 15, 1785, Letters, I, 372; Price, July 29, Letters, I, 432-433. On Rush's universalism, see Richard Eddy, "Benjamin Rush," Christian Leader, Oct. 1, 1885; and Eddy, Universalism in America, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1886), Chapter III.

Writing to Adams in 1808, Rush summarized his final rather individualistic religious position--one that embraced aspects of Calvinism, Arminianism, and universalism:

> . . . I enjoy the satisfaction of living in peace with my own conscience, and, what will surprise you not a little, in peace with all denominations of Christians, for while I refuse to be the slave of any sect, I am the friend of them all . . . . my creed . . . . differs materially from Dr. Brown's, as expressed in his Religio Medici. It is a compound of the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of most of our Christian churches.[8]

What we shall attempt to do in the following sections is to examine Rush's creed in detail in order to understand more clearly the complex relationship between science and religion in his thought, and the basis for his final preference of Christian fideism to rationalism as a means to a better society. Christian faith enabled Rush to maintain his belief in a millennial age. If man's inept reason, folly, and depravity ultimately doomed the rationalist's utopia, yet by humbling man's stubborn pride, it did prepare the way for God's kingdom on earth. The skeptical rejection of rationalism was the bridge to faith, to a reliance on God's providence. Suffering prepared man for the millennium. "We are advancing through suffering (the usual road) to peace and happiness," Rush wrote Jeremy Belknap in 1788. "Night preceded day, and chaos, order, in

[8]Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 962-963. Ironically, in view of the skeptical fideism of both writers, Rush was perhaps closer to Browne in his beliefs than he realized.

the creation of the world."[9] And Rush's acceptance of universalism became the means of reconciliation between God and man. If Rush could not accept the Unitarian thesis that man was too good for God to damn him, he could accept the Universalist thesis that God, in his infinite mercy, was too good to damn man forever.[10]

[9]Belknap, May 6, 1788, Letters, I, 461. See also Adams, Jan. 22, 1778, Letters, I, 191; John Montgomery, Aug. 5, 1801, Letters, II, 837; Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

[10]We noted in the introduction to Chapter II that David Hartley and Joseph Butler influenced Rush's religious views considerably. In this section, we traced the formative influences of Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Finley on his Calvinistic theology and the key role Elhanan Winchester played in his conversion to universalism. In his many writings he acknowledge the impact of several other theologians on his religious beliefs--namely, Richard Baxter, Martin Luther, John Calvin, George Whitefield, and John Wesley. The variety of opinions represented by these men is an indication in itself of Rush's heterodox theology. He was attracted to Richard Baxter, "justly considered as one of the greatest and best men England ever produced," because "his creed . . . embraced both the Calvanist and Arminian principles" (Adams, Sept. 4, 1811, Letters, II, 1101. See James Rush, June 8, 1810, Letters, II, 1051). Wesley, Whitefield, Calvin, and Luther, Rush believed, were perhaps the greatest leaders of Protestantism. "A library might be composed of the books written against Luther, Calvin, Whitefield, and Westley [sic]," he observed. "Where are those books now? And who presumes at this day to call in question the integrity or the great achievements of those men in reforming and benefiting the world?" (Ibid.). While studying medicine in London in 1768-1769, he visited Whitefield frequently ("Travels Through Life," pp. 55-57). He probably first met him in July or August, 1754, when Whitefield was preaching in Philadelphia (Ibid., pp. 55 n. 42). In a letter to Ebenezer Hazard, May 21, 1765, Letters, I, 13-14, Rush enthusiastically described Whitefield's preaching at the Second Church. While a student in Edinburgh, he heard Wesley preach twice ("Travels Through Life," pp. 56-57). Whitefield and Wesley, he wrote in his autobiography, "constituted the two largest and brightest orbs that appeared in the hemisphere of the Church in the 18th Century. Probably they were exceeded only by the apostles in zeal and usefulness" (Ibid., p. 56).

II. The Relationship Between Science and Religion in Rush's Theology

If science was one of the foundations of Rush's philosophical thought, religion was certainly another. Rush believed that religion and philosophy were essentially compatible. In reaction against William Godwin's philosophical and religious perfectionism and political radicalism, he observed that Christianity "contains the greatest scope for genius of any science in the world, nor is philosophy opposed to any of its principles or precepts when they are properly understood and explained."[11]

Rush was so convinced of the necessary connection between the two, that he believed any philosophical system failing to consider religion was doomed to error. "The best criterion of the truth of a philosophical opinion," he maintained, "is its tendency to produce exalted ideas, of the Divine Being, and humble views of ourselves."[12] What was philosophy, Rush asked, if it did "not lead us nearer to the Parent of the Universe and the source and

[11]John Seward, Dec. 28, 1796, Letters, II, 783. Although Godwin had some original thoughts on government and morality, "upon the subject of religion," Rush noted, "he writes like a madman" (Ibid.). See also Ashbel Green, Dec. 31, 1812, Letters, II, 1173-1174.

[12]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 178. Rush thought his doctrine of "animal life" met this requirement because it provided a physiological support for the Calvinistic doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty (Ibid., pp. 178-179).

center of all perfection and happiness?"[13]

But reciprocally philosophy aided religion too. It was a mistake to suppose Christianity only an internal revelation of the moral sense, he noted in his study of the moral faculty. "The truths of Christianity" were also derived from the human understanding; hence "they will become intelligible to us only in proportion as the human genius is stretched, by means of philosophy, to its utmost dimensions." "Our imperfect knowledge of the phenomena and laws of nature," he suggested, was "one reason why some parts of the Christian revelation are still involved in obscurity."[14] Religion and philosophy, then, must join efforts to promote the well-being of humanity, for

> truths, upon all subjects, mutually support each other. . . . The truths of philosophy and Christianity dwell alike in the mind of the Deity, and reason and religion are equally the offspring of his goodness. They must, therefore, stand and fall together. . . . Happy era! when the divine and the philosopher shall embrace each other, and unite their labours for the reformation and happiness of mankind![15]

Rush considered religion, therefore, as an important ingredient of his total philosophy. But before considering

[13]Jeremy Belknap, July 13, 1789, Letters, I, 521. ". . . we err, not only in religion but in philosophy likewise, because we 'do not know or believe the scriptures'" ("The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 122).

[14]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 211.

[15]Ibid.

his religious thought in detail, we must note how science created both harmony and discord in his theological speculations.

Rush's suggestion that a better knowledge of "the phenomena and laws of nature" might aid revelation demonstrated his feeling that science and religion were not hostile, but rather congenial to each other. He praised David Hartley, therefore, because he had "established an indissoluble union between physiology, metaphysics, and Christianity. He has so disposed them that they mutually afford not only support but beauty and splendor to each other."[16] If religion was susceptible to scientific analysis and demonstration, then the theologian, by applying the techniques of natural philosophy, natural history, and medicine, might reasonably hope to create a science of religion.[17]

"The sciences," he explained in his proposal to use the Bible as a textbook, "have been compared to a circle of which religion composes a part. To understand any one of them perfectly it is necessary to have some knowledge of them all." Bacon, Boyle, and Newton, for example, engaged in religious inquiry and the knowledge thus gained aided their scientific endeavors. Recent discoveries, Rush

[16]Jefferson, Jan. 2, 1811, Letters, II, 1075.

[17]See "Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 89.

added, revealed "a striking agreement" between Biblical events and "some of the operations and productions of nature," especially those in Whitehurst's commentary on the deluge, in Samuel Stanhope Smith's account of the causes of the variety of color in the human species, and in James Bruce's Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile.[18] "It remains yet to be shown," he concluded, "how many other events, related in the Bible, accord with some late important discoveries in the principles of medicine. The events, and the principles alluded to, mutually establish the truth of each other."[19] What Rush suggested here was not only his own approach to theology, but the reason for it. He constantly utilized natural history and medicine to elucidate and support orthodox religious doctrines and Biblical revelation because he believed the truths of science and religion ideally reinforced each other. As a result, he frequently found scientific reasons for accepting Calvinistic views traditionally dependent on faith and logic for support.[20]

Although he never rejected Biblical and fideistic

[18]On Smith's essay, see Daniel J. Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948), pp. 63-64, 66-68. Rush took notes in his journal on Bruce's Travels--see "Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), pp. 194-196.

[19]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 122-123.

[20]See Rush's use of physiological science to support the doctrines of immortality and God's sovereignty in the discussion of Rush's materialism in Chapter II.

grounds for Christianity, he did advance--under the influence of science--practical, natural, physiological arguments for religion. In his lectures on the theory of "animal" life, Rush justified religious belief in terms of natural history. "Man," he asserted, "is as naturally a religious, as he is a social, and domestic animal; and the same violence is done to his mental faculties, by robbing him of a belief in a God, that is done, by dooming him to live in a cell, deprived of the objects and pleasures of social and domestic life." Atheism injured mental health because there was a "necessary and immutable connection between the texture of the human mind, and the worship of an object of some kind." Atheists in France demonstrated this proposition, Rush noted, by having "instituted the worship of nature, of fortune, and of human reason; and in some instances, with ceremonies of the most expensive and splendid kind."[21]

If religious unbelief threatened mental health, it also, Rush stressed in his discussion on the causes of

[21]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 171. "Man is naturally as much a praying and worshiping animal as he is a social or a domestic animal, and the same perversion of the natural state of his mind takes place when he ceases to worship a being or an object of some kind as when he lives in solitude or in a state of celibacy" (Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096). "We are all necessarily Religious as we are reasoning and musical animals. It is true we are disposed to false Religion; so we are to false reasoning and false music, but this shows the depth of each of those principles in the human mind" ("Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 335, Aug. 9, 1809).

animal life, menaced physical well-being. "The different religions of the world, by the activity they excite in the mind, have a sensible influence upon human life." By removing thought "from the most sublime, and . . . love, from the most perfect of all possible objects," atheism therefore became "the worst of sedatives" to the mind. In contrast, since religions elevated human reason and encouraged the affections of love and hope, they were most friendly to health and life.[22]

Christianity, moreover, was "more calculated to produce those effects, than any other religion in the world."[23] All of its principles and precepts were designed "to promote the happiness of society, and the safety and well being of civil government."[24] Thus, ". . . in proportion as mankind adopt its principles, and obey its precepts, they will be wise, and happy."[25]

What this added up to was a physiology of religion. Natural history became a practical criterion for evaluating theological systems; a particular religion was judged good if it benefited the mental, physical, and social health

[22] Ibid., pp. 170-171.

[23] Ibid.

[24] "Mode of Education," 1798, Selected Writings, p. 88. Christianity "is opposed to everything which disturbs or violates the order and happiness of society," in relation to individuals or nations with each other (Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1792, Letters, I, 620).

[25] "The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 117.

of the community. For example, Rush felt religion was an "infallible" remedy for maladies of the mind derived from vice. "A belief in God's providence, and a constant reliance upon his power and goodness, impart a composure and firmness to the mind which render it incapable of being moved by all the real, or imaginary evils of life."[26] But Christianity, Rush was convinced, especially met the test:

> Such is the salutary operation of its doctrines, and precepts upon health and life, that if its divine authority rested upon no other argument, this alone would be sufficient to recommend it to our belief. How long mankind may continue to prefer substituted pursuits and pleasures, to this invigorating stimulus, is uncertain; but the time we are assured will come, when the understanding shall be elevated from its present inferior objects, and the luxated passions be reduced to their original order.[27]

"If there were no hereafter," he observed in proposing a Federal Council on morals, "individuals and societies would be great gainers by attending public worship every Sunday. Rest from labor in the house of God winds up the machine of both soul and body better than anything else, and thereby invigorates it for the labors and duties of the ensuing week."[28]

[26]"On the Different Species of Phobia," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 226.

[27]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 171.

[28]"To the Ministers," June 21, 1788, Letters, I, 464. ". . . if the Bible did not convey a single direction for the attainment of future happiness, it should be read in

Nevertheless, Rush's religious thought also demonstrated the incompatible nature of science and religion in the 18th century, the inherent conflict between rationalism and the Calvinistic heritage. This paradox in his thought was apparent even in his argument that religion promoted the mental and physical health of the species, for he noted that if Christianity aided animal life, human reason by itself did not. Man's mind would regain its original order "only by the influence of the Christian religion, after all the efforts of human reason to produce it, by means of civilization, philosophy, liberty, and government, have been exhausted to no purpose."[29]

As we have seen, the conflict between science and theology was apparent in his tendency after 1800 to reject the scientific in favor of the religious basis for morality[30]; it was apparent in his rejection of rationalism in favor of

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our schools in preference to all other books, from its containing the greatest portion of that kind of knowledge which is calculated to produce private and public temporal happiness" ("The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 122). Rush suggested medical reasons for religious ceremonies. Thus, "Washing frequently in water, we find, was enjoined upon the Jews and Mahometans, as a part of their religious ceremonies. . . . a Jew and a Mussulman contend for, and practise their ablutions, without remembering that they were instituted only to guard them against those cutaneous diseases, to which the constant accumulation of scales upon their skins in a warm climate, naturally exposed them" ("Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, p. 362).

[29]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 171.

[30]See Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545; Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993; Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1096; "The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 125.

Christianity as a means to social happiness[31]; it was apparent in his fideistic rejection of a utopia of science and reason in favor of a millennium brought about by God's providence[32]; it was apparent in his alternating between a doctrine of determinism, based on his materialistic views, and a belief in the union of necessity and free agency[33]; and it was apparent in his dissatisfaction with Lockean epistemology in accounting for the origin of knowledge.[34] Rush rejected science also--as we shall see--in his preference of Scriptural over natural revelation and in his attack upon natural religion, especially deism.

What we have in Rush's thought, then, is a progressive shift in his attitude toward the role of science as a means to progress. Where the youthful Rush saw "the place of my nativity becoming the Edinburgh of America," the older Rush

[31]". . . human reason alone in its most cultivated state will not make men free or happy without the aid of divine revelation and the influences of the Spirit of the Gospel upon the hearts of men" (James Kidd, Nov. 25, 1793, Letters, II, 746). See also Noah Webster, July 20, 1798, Letters, II, 799; Ashbel Green, Dec. 9, 1802, Letters, II, 854.

[32]Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919; John Montgomery, June 6, 1801, Letters, II, 834; Montgomery, Aug. 5, 1801, Letters, II, 837-838.

[33]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 177-180; "Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-30, in I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 94.

[34]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 272, Sept. 8, 1807; p. 339, Aug. 8, 1811; p. 247, Nov. 17, 1799; p. 297, Sept. 2, 1811; "Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 181-182, 188-190.

pointed out the failure of science "to improve the condition of mankind."[35] In a letter to Adams in 1806, he expressed his final disillusion with scientific schemes of progress as well as his fideism:

> I thank you for your excellent strictures upon the visionary ideas of the perfectionists in morals, physic, and government. It was from hearing and reading their nonsense in 1792 that I first despaired of the happy issue of the French Revolution. Perhaps Lord Bacon laid the foundation in part of their madness by the well-known aphorism that "knowledge is power." One of the zealots of this opinion supposed it would extend over matter as well as mind, that it would suspend and invert the laws of nature, and thus destroy the inductions from miracles. I well remember one of his sayings was "that the time would soon come when a man should thrust his head into the fire without burning it." Where are all the vagaries of that eventful year now? The Conventions, Directories, and Emperor of France have dissipated them all, and the foundations of that religion which can alone make men and nations happy have acquired by their destruction a firmness in our world they never had before. Thus not only the wrath but all the follies and crimes of man have, in the language of Scripture, combined indirectly to praise God.[36]

[35] John Morgan, Nov. 16, 1766, Letters, I, 29; Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

[36] Adams, Nov. 25, 1806, Letters, II, 935.

III. Rush's Arminian Views

Rush's theology was a combination of Calvinism and Arminianism, of "the orthodoxy and heterodoxy of most of our Christian churches," as he called it.[37] "I care not," he wrote Adams in 1810, "whether you are a Calvinist or Arminian or both, for both believe the truth, and a true system of religion I believe can only be formed from a union of the tenets of each of them."[38] The doctrine of universal salvation bridged the gap between his "ancient calvinistical" and his "newly adopted Arminian" beliefs.[39] God's providence, he believed, had decreed "that each Sect might be a depository of some great truths of the Gospel, and that it might by that means be better preserved."

> Thus to the Catholics and Moravians he has committed the Godhead of the Saviour, hence they worship and pray to him; to the Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Baptist Church the decrees of God and partial redemption, or the salvation of the first fruits, which they ignorantly suppose to include all who shall be saved. To the Lutherans and Methodists he has committed the doctrine of universal redemption, to the Quakers the Godhead and influences of the Holy Spirit, to the Unitarians, the humanity of our Saviour, or the doctrine of "God manifested in the flesh" or the "Word made flesh" which was denied, St. John tells us, in

[37]Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 963.

[38]Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1035.

[39]"Travels Through Life," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 163.

> the first ages of the Church, and which is admitted in a mystical way only by one Sect of Christians.[40]

Rush complained, however, that in emphasizing a particular doctrine, the various sects tended to oversimplify themselves.[41] He preferred to harmonize the doctrines of all the sects, for "when united they make a great whole, and that whole is the salvation of all men."[42]

Rush tempered, then, the rigid doctrines of his Calvinistic background with Arminian beliefs. He rejected strict Calvinistic principles because it was "impossible to advance human happiness while we believe the Supreme Being to possess the passions of weak or wicked men and govern our conduct by such opinions."[43] Rush's Arminianism was

[40]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 339-340, Aug. 14, 1811.

[41]"There is a propensity in all Sciences to simplify themselves and to ascribe that to one which should be divided among many causes. For example, how few Sects honour Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in Religion as they should do. The Socinians honour the Father only, the Catholics the Saviour chiefly, and the Quakers the Holy Spirit above both! How few include all the ends of our Saviour's death in their belief of the Atonement. Each contends for one end only, while 6 or 7 other ends are clearly revealed in the Scriptures. Many exalt one power or one sett [sic] of powers only in the mind instead of all. Many confine Religion to one power only instead of applying it to all--the Episcopalians to the understanding, the Methodists to the passions, and the Quakers the moral powers" (Ibid., p. 224, July 18, 1792).

[42]Ibid., p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811.

[43]Jeremy Belknap, Oct. 7, 1788, Letters, I, 490. "The divines hate me for holding tenets they say lead to materialism and that are opposed to the rigid doctrines of Calvin" (Adams, Sept. 8, 1810, Letters, II, 1061). See also "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 165.

apparent in many of his beliefs. Though he did not reject the Calvinistic doctrine of God's sovereignty, he balanced it with an assertion of God's mercy.[44] His belief in the salvation of all mankind, of course, involved a rejection of the Calvinistic dogmas of election, prevenient and irresistible grace, and limited atonement.

Likewise, his occasional recognition of the power of reason to comprehend religious truth revealed the Arminian drift of his religious thinking, although because he believed in human depravity he never really lost his Calvinistic distrust in reason.[45] "The truths of Christianity," said Rush, "afford the greatest scope for the human understanding" because of its power to judge and comprehend truth, and they therefore would become more "intelligible" to man as reason was enlarged by philosophy.[46] Christianity and "sound and cultivated reason" were not hostile to each other because, as he explained it, "reason is nothing but imperfect religion, and religion is nothing but perfect reason."[47] On the issue of free will, however, Rush

[44]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 226, July 25, 1792.

[45]See Macklin Thomas, "The Idea of Progress in Franklin, Freneau, Barlow, and Rush" (Unpublished dissertation, Wisconsin, 1938), p. 236--quoted in Russel B. Nye, The Cultural Life of the New Nation, 1776-1830 (New York, 1960), p. 103; John R. B. Rodgers, June 25, 1795, Letters, II, 762.

[46]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 211.

[47]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 46.

remained essentially Calvinistic--to assert man's will "acted independently of external circumstances" was to give him powers found only in the Creator[48]--but on several occasions he did speculate on a mystical union of Arminian liberty and Calvinistic necessity.[49]

The doctrine of good works was the most conspicuous Arminian trait in Rush's religion. ". . . I am often struck," he wrote Adams, "with the perfection of that divine government in which 'a cup of cold water' (the cheapest thing in the world), given under the influence of proper principles, 'shall not lose its reward.'"[50] He was convinced that both "the agency of divine and human efforts" brought about salvation.[51] "But after all that has been said of doctrines, they only 'who have done good shall come forth to the resurrection unto life, and they only who have done evil to the resurrection of damnation.'"[52]

[48]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 178. See also "1792-1813," p. 229, Aug. 22, 1793.

[49]See "1792-1813," p. 334, ca. 1809; p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811; p. 344; "Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-30, in I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 94; "Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 441-443; Riley, p. 97.

[50]Adams, Aug. 14, 1805, Letters, II, 902.

[51]"1792-1813," p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811. ". . . posthumous fame, . . . if acquired by doing good, . . . will all be added to a man's reward in a future state. . ." (Ibid.).

[52]Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1035. Though Rush believed in final restitution, he did not rule out future punishment of long duration for sin ("Travels Through Life," p. 164).

Good works provided Rush with a strong motivation for humanitarian activities, for "works of mercy to the souls and bodies of men. . . . are means of grace."[53] "One thing is certain," he informed John Coakley Lettsom concerning prison reform, "that if no alleviation is given to human misery, men grow good by attempting it."[54] As Rush grew increasingly skeptical of ever reforming society, he consoled himself with the thought that his efforts would not go unrewarded in a future state:

> Let us. . . console ourselves for the unsuccessful efforts of our lives to serve our fellow creatures by recollecting that we have aimed well, that we have faithfully strove to tear from their hands the instruments of death with which they were about to destroy themselves, that we have attempted to take off their fancied crowns and royal robes and to clothe them with their own proper dresses, and that we have endeavored to snatch the poisoned bowl from their lips and to replace it with pleasant and wholesome food. We shall not I hope lose our reward for these well-intended labors of love.[55]

The reformer's efforts to aid his fellow man, however inept they might be, prepared the way for God's universal salvation:

> Let us always remember that no good effort is lost. . . . Let us advance one step further--and while mankind laugh at our visionary schemes to make them wiser and better, let us

[53]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 181, Jan. 1790.

[54]Lettsom, Sept. 28, 1787, Letters, I, 441.

[55]Adams, July 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1091. See also John Montgomery, Feb. 11, 1803, Letters, II, 855; "1792-1813," p. 312, Nov. 16, 1802.

pity and forgive them. Our Saviour thought them worthy of his precious life and death. How delightful then should it be to us to love those who he has loved, to serve those whom he has served, and if necessary to die for those for whom he died! Our labor will not be in vain, for we shall be the feeble heralds of that Almighty Goodness which will finally subdue all things to itself and render the Atonement effectual to the salvation of all mankind.[56]

[56]Jeremy Belknap, Aug. 25, 1790, Letters, I, 571.

IV. Rush's Calvinism: Depravity and Original Sin

Although Rush accepted a number of Arminian doctrines, he retained several Calvinistic principles--especially those concerning God and man. He could not reject his belief in human depravity, nor in an all-powerful God, whose providence ruled the world. Evil, he believed, was a positive force in the universe and man was cursed by original sin. But influenced by rationalism and science, Rush modified these concepts to some extent: man was not all bad; God's mercy was as great as His sovereignty.

We have seen how Rush's belief in the inherent depravity of man colored his political theory to the extent that he rejected pure democracy, led him to despair of progress through reason and science, and paved the way for his skeptical faith.[57] Yet man's fall into evil was not complete. There were "fragments of good" even in criminals, Rush maintained, for "there never was a soul so completely shipwrecked by vice that something divine was not saved from its wreck."[58] "We are not totally depraved," he observed, for "benevolence is a leading feature in human nature."[59] Fortunately, man's moral faculty was preserved

[57]See chapter I, section ii, and chapter II, section v.

[58]Thomas Eddy, Oct. 19, 1803, Letters, II, 875.

[59]Rebecca Smith, July 1, 1791, Letters, I, 585. See also "Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 335, ca. 1809.

from the ruins of his fall, in order to guide him back to Paradise. If the combined efforts of science, religion, liberty, and government could only develop the powers of that faculty to the full, man might be raised eventually and ideally to the level of angels, even God.[60] Rush's experience with corruption in politics, religion, and the medical profession, however, soon dashed his optimism about human nature.[61]

The main drift of Rush's convictions concerning human nature, then was toward Calvinism. Noting that during the Revolution most of the wise measures of Congress and the military successes were the results of accident, passion, necessity, or "lucky blunders," Rush concluded that "these propositions . . . show the weakness and folly of human nature. Man is indeed fallen! He discovers it every day in domestic, in social, and in political life."[62] He therefore opposed capital punishment because men were

> all fallible, and deficient in a thousand duties which they owe to each other. To punish murder, therefore, or any other crime, by death . . . is to exalt the angry and vindictive passions of men to an equality

[60]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), pp. 185-186, 209.

[61]Concerning clergymen "too good to do good," see Julia Rush, July 16, 1791, Letters, I, 600; Adams, June 28, 1811, Letters, II, 1086. On political depravity, see David Ramsay, March or April 1788, Letters, I, 454.

[62]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545.

> with the perfect law of God. It is to place imperfect individuals and corrupted human governments, upon the throne of the righteous judge of the universe. . . .[63]

"Indeed," he told Adams in 1806, "so consonant is frailty with everything that belongs to human nature, that it may perhaps be truly said that there is something wrong in that man who . . . has never erred."[64] His doctrine of animal life, he believed, validated, in biological terms, the truth of these beliefs concerning man's fallen nature; it was "calculated to humble the pride of man; by teaching him his constant dependence upon his Maker for his existence, and that he has no preeminence in his tenure of it, over the meanest insect that flutters in the air, or the humblest plant that grows upon the earth."[65]

As a result of his inherent depravity, man had largely destroyed the order God intended for society, had constantly brought evil out of good.[66] "It is peculiar to man," said Rush, "to divide what was intended by the Author of nature to be indivisible." "The caprice and folly of man" had separated religion and morality, reason and sensation, government and freedom, "so happily paired by the Creator

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[63]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, pp. 43-44.

[64]Adams, Aug. 22, 1806, Letters, II, 927. See also Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 979.

[65]"Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 179-180.

[66]John Montgomery, April 9, 1788, Letters, I, 456.

of the world."[67]

It was necessary, then, to establish control of man's evil nature in order to restore God's symmetry to society. Many Jeffersonian philosophers, Rush felt, failed to curb human depravity because, inspired by Locke and Rousseau, they mistakenly ascribed its origin to environmental factors, such as government, organized religion, science, or education. Rush, on the other hand, believed it was absurd to derive man's sinfulness from any other source than the Biblical account of the Fall: "In the Bible alone man is described as he is."[68] He was not surprised, therefore, that "science, civilization, and government" had failed miserably to cure the defects of man's nature. "Christianity is alone equal to this business."[69]

A belief in original sin, the source of human depravity, was another tenet of Calvinism Rush retained in spite of his developing religious liberalism. With the Fall of man, both the natural and moral worlds fell; original sin created "this breach in the symmetry of the divine government," and destroyed the unity and harmony that God intended for man's happiness.[70] But the Fall, he believed, was not absolute;

[67]"The Progress of Medicine," 1811, Selected Writings, p. 247.

[68]Adams, Jan. 13, 1809, Letters, II, 993. See also Adams, Nov. 17, 1812, Letters, II, 1168.

[69]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545.

[70]"On Slave-Keeping," 1793, Selected Writings, p. 13; "Progress," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 247.

the Supreme Being salvaged the moral faculty from the ruins so that man might eventually find his way back to Eden.[71] Rush also rejected the doctrine of infant damnation.[72]

Basically, however, he accepted the doctrine with its implications of transference of the sins of fathers to their children, of guilt to innocent people; he sought to prove it not only by means of Scripture and logic, but also by the evidence of natural history. Thus paradoxically, though Rush finally repudiated biological sources of depravity, he utilized that science to defend the Calvinistic viewpoint concerning original sin.[73] "Original sin," he maintained, "is favoured by the ideas of pregnancy and parturition being diseases. Sin and suffering began together."[74] Observing that the prophets prayed for forgiveness of the sins of their fathers and that the children of Israel were punished for the iniquity of Achan and David, Rush asked,

> Do not these facts suggest the unity of the Species, and the transferring of guilt to innocent persons, and thus show the uniformity of the divine government in punishing our Saviour for the iniquities of the world? Does it not show, too, that we are all members of

[71]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 185-186.

[72]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 251, June 20, 1800.

[73]Occasionally, before 1790, Rush attributed political depravity to a natural, predatory instinct in man. See "Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," Selected Writings, p. 73; David Ramsay, Mar. or Apr. 1788, Letters, I, 454.

[74]"1792-1813," p. 335, ca. 1809.

> one body, and that all are punished by the misery of one?[75]

In his journal in 1809, he recorded a long discussion on original sin, again utilizing the biological concept of the unity and equality of the human species while drawing analogies, as he so frequently did, from medical science for illustration. To reconcile God's justice with the fact that children suffered for the sins of their fathers, many argued that they were actually being punished for their own sins committed in a prior state of existence. But this defense of the justice of God, Rush contended, was unnecessary,

> if we extend our ideas as far as we should do into the unity of the human race. It has been compared to a single body. Now, we see parts suffer for each other seperately [sic] and together in diseases, which parts did not contract those diseases. Thus the feet suffer in the gout for the intemperance of the tongue, and the whole body suffers, too, for the sin of the hands, which steal, when it is punished by whipping or hanging. To the Deity the whole human race probably appears as much a unit as a single human body appears to be a unit to the eye of man. It was once evidently so in Adam, and will be so again, we are told, in Jesus Christ. This doctrine is calculated to produce universal love, for vicarious sufferings do that necessarily which we are commanded to do voluntarily, that is "bear one another's burdens."[76]

Combining evidence from natural history, logic, and Biblical authority, Rush continued his defense of the orthodox

[75] Ibid., p. 342.

[76] Ibid., p. 337, Dec. 21, 1809.

concept of original sin in terms of God's sovereign justice:

> But is it just in this manner to punish the innocent for the guilty? It would not be so in a man, but "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." Good and evil are both his. He can dispose of them as he pleases. Many things would be wrong in man that are not in his Creator. He is forbidden to revenge an injury, but this injury never passes with impunity. Vengeance is the property of God, and he never fails to inflict it at the time and in the manner, and to the degree in which it shall have the most effect. This could not be done by man. It would be in his hands out of time, done in an improper manner, and in an over proportion to the injury. It would be wrong in man to kill, because he has no property in the life of a fellow creature, but all souls, or all lives are God's. He has an exclusive property in them, and may take them away when and in what manner he pleases. When he commanded Moses and Joshua to destroy the lives of the heathen nations, including women and children, he exercised his own just power over them. The sword of Moses and Joshua was no more to him than famine or pestilence. It executed his will. Without a divine command for that act, the destruction of those nations would have been murder. In like manner God does justly transfer good and evil. They are both his, and the whole race of man is one. There is no more injustice in transferring evil than in transferring the gout from one part of the body to the other. If this gout were brought on by intemperance the tongue only offended, but the feet, the hands, the head, and the whole body suffer for it, and the tongue less than any other part. The body is a unit; equally so is the whole of Adam's family.[77]

His theory that man's curse to labor after the Fall indirectly benefited life was the best example of his use of science to elucidate the doctrine of original sin. Noting that God had "kindly imposed" exercise upon man

[77] Ibid., pp. 337-338, Dec. 21, 1809.

in Paradise in order to promote healthy life, Rush observed that "The change which the human body underwent by the fall, rendered the same salutory stimulus necessary to its life, in the more active form of labor." It was God's power to bring good out of evil, and thus even the evil passions which dominated the human species after the Fall provided a stimulus to physical life.[78] In this scientific version of the "paradox of the fortunate fall," then, Rush saw evidence of God's supreme goodness and mercy:

> Man was formed to be active. The vigour of his mind, and the health of his body can be fully preserved by no other means, than by labour of some sort. Hence, when we read the sentence which was pronounced upon man after the fall, "That in the sweat of his brow he should eat bread all the days of his life." We cannot help admiring the goodness of the Supreme Being, in connecting his punishment with what had now become the necessary means of preserving his health. Had God abandoned him to idleness, he would have entailed tenfold misery upon him. The solid parts of his body, particularly the nerves, would have lost their tone--the muscles would have lost their feeling and moving powers--and the fluids in consequence of this, would have lost their original or native qualities, and have stagnated in every part of his body. But, instead of inflicting this complicated punishment upon him, he bids him be ACTIVE, and implants a principle within him which impels him to it.[79]

Most of the consequences of the Fall, however, were not so fortunate. The Fall of man, Rush felt, destroyed the original order of the powers of the human mind; hence the

[78]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 141, 144-145.

[79]"Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, p. 358.

moral powers no longer occupied the highest place.[80] Among the curses of original sin, Rush included parturition, disease, death, and even the "chains" of laws and government.[81]

The doctrine of original sin, then, explained in some measure the origin of evil in the moral world; from the viewpoint of the "fortunate fall," God "permits sin, misery, and death in the moral world, that he may hereafter display more illustriously the transcendent glories of righteousness, happiness, and immortal life."[82] Rush's interest in the problem, however, did not end here. Was evil a positive force in the universe? Would it be defeated? Was God the author of evil?

The conception of evil as "good in disguise," or "harmony not understood"--discussed in the section concerning Rush's romanticism in Chapter III--was one of Rush's answers to these questions. The problem of evil was no problem at all; perhaps what appeared as evil to man's limited perception, when viewed from a larger perspective, was really "a necessary part of 'universal good.'"[83]

[80]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 185, May 27, 1790.

[81]Adams, Feb. 1, 1810, Letters, II, 1034.

[82]"Punishing," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 39.

[83]Griffith Evans, March 4, 1796, Letters, II, 72; Adams, Oct. 31, 1807, Letters, II, 954-955.

In his lecture on "Liberty and Necessity," he answered these questions in terms of the "fortunate fall," the distinction between foreordination and predestination, and the union of liberty and necessity:

> Prescience is only a human term, but like many others applied to the Deity in accommodation to our weak capacities. Prophecies are to Him things present; to us things to come--hence their great accuracy. It is improper and dishonorable to His glorious Oneness in existence as well as nature. It is impossible matters should be otherwise. Succession belongs only to man. God can do and know nothing in succession. So far for necessity. But all this is compatable with the most perfect liberty. The knowledge of God of actions flows from a perfect knowledge of the union between cause and effect in creation. All is still free. An artist can tell from the construction of a machine exactly its strokes, etc., without touching it after its wheels are set in motion, although he still upholds it in his hand. We still live, move and have our being in God. . . . Nor does this idea destroy man's responsibility. He is still free. His liberty is essential to the necessity--otherwise his action would have no moral nature and could not be the object of pardon, and for this purpose alone evil existed. It must be free to be a crime, and crimes existed, not for a display of vindictive justice in endless punishment, but for a display of love in endless and universal happiness.[84]

In his commonplace book in 1794, he framed still another answer to the problem of evil, from the viewpoint of his unitary theory of disease. Like disease, moral evil "consists in original weakness, and in consequent derangement."

[84]"Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 29-30; quoted in I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), p. 94.

The derangement that followed debility, or weakness, in sin as well as in disease was of three kinds: an excess or deficiency of motion producing irregularity; "error loci," or an absence of a fitness of things; and "solution of continuity," or a breach in anything normally continuous. Both disease and moral evil, then, were negative in their origin in debility, but were followed by the positive effects of various kinds of derangement. Thus, moral evil originated, Rush suggested, when the Supreme Being abstracted His power to do good from Adam's mind; from this negative weakness followed the positive effects of moral evil in all mankind. In this physiological version of the origin of evil, Rush found evidence of the"Unity in the works of God--as one Sin introduced the vanity and complications of Sins, so one disease, viz. debility, produced all the vanity and complications of diseases. One negative cause in both cases produces all the positive effects that are ascribed to them."[85]

In a passage in his journal for the years 1789 to 1791, Rush made similar notations on moral evil as "nothing positive, but an absence only of moral good." This theory, he thought, not only explained the origin of

[85]"1792-1813," pp. 232-233, ca. 1794. Rush told his medical students that while mental diseases were derangements of constituted order and thus real evils in the present world, nevertheless "all evil has wisdom in it, and every folly and vice, like every particle of matter, is necessary" (Purnell MS., p. 90; Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 100).

evil, but it absolved God of the responsibility of creating evil and indicated the means by which Christ would defeat moral evil:

> Does not this relieve our Systems of divinity from the awful charge against God of having created, or of being the author of Sin? He only withdrew his moral omnipresence or energy from the wills of Devils and man, and sin followed. Free will was necessary to happiness. It was abused. It can be held only by God himself. Therefore Jehovah commits the happiness of his creatures to the will of his Son, who has, in preferring good, established happiness for all his creatures. Sin, like disease, is weakness. It is destroyed by power, or strength, as disease is by stimuli. Nothing is annihilated therefore in the destruction of sin. Good, in the form of power and love, fills its space. It is conveyed into the human mind by means of the holy Spirit. This Spirit expels nothing. It only restores strength to weakness and order to disorder, as stimuli cure weakness and convulsions in the human body.[86]

[86]"1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 193, May 9, 1791.

V. Rush's Calvinism: God's Absolute Sovereignty

If man, because he inherited sinfulness from Adam's transgression, counted for little in Rush's theological system, God counted for virtually everything in it. His view of God was basically the Calvinistic doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty, yet he balanced this with the rationalistic liberals' emphasis on God's mercy and goodness. Thus he criticized the tendency of many denominations to adopt "too partial notions of God and his attributes," implying that theology ought to regard the Calvinistic God of sovereign justice and the Arminian God of mercy equally. "God is undivided. His mercy must be coextensive with his justice--both [are] infinite."[87] Repeatedly Rush juxtaposed supreme power and goodness as attributes of the Deity in his essays and letters.[88]

Rush's concept of God as a "supreme and omnipotent Being" was the necessary complement to his belief in natural depravity and original sin.[89] In defending God's

[87]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 226, July 25, 1792; p. 344.

[88]"Observations on the Government of Pennsylvania," 1777, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 57. See also "On the Different Species of Phobia," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 226; "The Vices and Virtues of Physicians," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 293; Adams, Oct. 23, 1780, Letters, I, 255; Julia Rush, Nov. 8, 1793, Letters, II, 743.

[89]Ebenezer Hazard, Nov. 18, 1765, Letters, I, 20.

justice in allowing the innocent to suffer from Adam's fall, Rush argued in Calvinistical terms that the power of the Deity was supreme. Good and evil being His, God dispensed them as He pleased, often in a manner that would be wrong in man. Man, for example, could not kill, "because he has no property in the life of a fellow creature," but God, whose power over all souls was supreme, might take away life "when and in what manner he pleases."[90] ". . . it is the prerogative of God," he asserted, "to bring good out of evil."[91]

God's power was so infinite, Rush maintained, that man could hope to comprehend but a small part of it--"In vain do we attempt to scan THY immensity, or to comprehend THY various modes of existence."[92] Even life itself remained one of God's impenetrable mysteries:

> Should it be asked, what is that peculiar organization of matter, which enables it to emit life, when acted upon by stimuli, I answer, I do not know. The great Creator has kindly established a witness of his unsearchable wisdom in every part of his works, in order to prevent our forgetting him, in the successful exercises of our reason. . . . It belongs exclusively to the true God to endow matter with those singular properties, which enable it under certain

[90]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 337, Dec. 21, 1809. ". . . the Supreme Being alone possesses a power to take away human life. . ." ("A Plan of a Peace-Office for the United States," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 20).

[91]John Montgomery, April 9, 1788, Letters, I, 456.

[92]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 208.

> circumstances, to exhibit the appearances of life.[93]

The intricate workings of God's power and justice, then, were inscrutable.

In developing his doctrine of God's sovereignty, Rush, utilizing science once again, stressed three aspects of this divine power: God was the prime mover of the universe; he governed it through both general and particular providence; he alone possessed free will in its truest sense.

He accepted the 18th-century belief in God as the first cause, or prime mover, of the universe, but he was not content to visualize God merely as one who had set the world in motion and then remained indifferently apart from it. To Rush, God was the continuous cause. He was convinced that his materialistic version of physical and mental life, "by rendering the continuance of animal life, no less than its commencement, the effect of the constant operation of divine power and goodness, . . . leads us to believe that the whole creation is supported in the same manner."[94] "I have supposed," he declared to Adams in 1812,

> that there is but one self-moving Being in the Universe, that all motion is the effect of his will imposed upon mind. Weights and springs, and wind and water and steam are substitutes only to an ever-existing, ever-acting, and omnipresent power. This is the uniform language of Revelation. There are

[93] "Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 176.

[94] Ibid., p. 179.

> no such words as the 'laws of nature' in the Bible. It speaks constantly of creation and preservation being the same thing.[95]

Moreover, the idea that life resulted from the constant influence of God's power, Rush insisted, "establishes the certainty of his universal and particular providence."[96] The activities of men, he declared, were "under the direction of a wise and good being; . . . all the events that relate to our individual happiness, whether from moral or physical causes, are in his hands and . . . his hand is in every event."[97] Though he never ruled out the possibility of divine intervention in the old orthodox Puritan sense, he believed God's providence operated primarily through second causes; ". . . the operations of the divine

[95]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171. "There can be no contingency with the Deity--all is fixed and immutable with Him; cause and effect, motive and action, creation and preservation, all one simple object and act" ("Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts, Ridgway MS., p. 28; I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII, 1907, 94). Rush opposed the idea of perpetual motion because it was contrary "to just ideas of the divine government, who has never created an automation, and who administered every part and moves every wheel in the great machinery of his own Government with his own hand" ("1792-1813," p. 309, 1812).

[96]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, pp. 178-179. The events of the Revolutionary War, Rush felt, contained "proofs of a general and particular providence" (Elizabeth Graeme Ferguson, Dec. 24, 1777, Letters, I, 178).

[97]"Upon the Pleasures of the Senses and of the Mind," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (Philadelphia, 1811), pp. 442-443; Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," p. 97.

government," said Rush, "are carried on in the moral, as in the natural world, by the instrumentality of second causes."[98] "The promises of heaven are often accomplished by means in which there is no departure from the common operations of nature."[99]

Rush never doubted the wisdom or justice of God's providential governing of the world, yet he was uncertain of its exact role in human affairs.[100] Occasionally, he suggested that "the affairs of men are governed alternately by and contrary to their wills, to teach us both to use our Reason and to rely upon Providence in all our Undertakings."[101] Usually, however, he felt God's providence was supreme to puny human efforts--as he wrote to Horatio Gates: "The affairs of nations as well as of individuals are under the direction of a wise and just

[98]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 201.

[99]_____, April 16, 1790, Letters, I, 561. ". . . even supernatural prophecies," he suggested, "are fulfilled by natural means" (Jeremy Belknap, June 21, 1790, Letters, I, 620).

[100]"Time and chance happen to all things as they appear to shortsighted morals. . . . But all is just as it should be. Infinite wisdom and justice direct all the affairs of the children of men" (Adams, Aug. 19, 1811, Letters, II, 1094).

[101]"1792-1813," p. 334, ca. 1809. To explain God's plan of divine justice Rush once offered Adams an explanation he had heard years before from Alexander Cruden, author of A Complete Concordance to the Holy Scriptures . . . (1737): "God punishes some crimes in this world to teach us there is a Providence, and permits others to escape with impunity to teach us there is a future judgment" (Adams, July 9, 1807, Letters, II, 949, 951 n. 1).

Providence. If the time be come for the extinction of ignorance and error, whether they relate to witchcraft or kingly power, no machinations of weak or wicked men can prevent the fulfillment of the benevolent decrees of heaven."[102] And to prove his point he argued that America's success in the Revolutionary War was due to "the great Arbiter of human events. . . . heaven seems resolved to have all the glory of deliverance to itself. The wisdom of our councils was often foolishness, and the strength of our arms was too often weakness."[103] Likewise he was "as perfectly satisfied that the Union of the States, in its form and adoption, is as much the work of a Divine Providence as any of the miracles recorded in the Old and New Testament. . . ."[104]

Yet ultimately Rush confessed to the inscrutability of God's providential rule of the universe. Perhaps both divine and human efforts were true, even if contradictory--examples of religious mystery intelligible to God only.[105] Or perhaps the role of men in events was illusory:

> In human events there are the same deceptions as in the visible appearance in nature. We ascribe events to men and causes which have no

[102]Horatio Gates, Nov. 30, 1797, Letters, II, 796.

[103]Abigail Adams, Sept. 3, 1778, Letters, I, 217-218. See also John Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 545; Adams, July 11, 1806, Letters, II, 924.

[104]Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, Letters, I, 475.

[105]"1792-1813," p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811.

> more existence than the Pleura furens or Archeus of Helmont or the stars and planets over human actions. The course of providence in governing the world and the influence of true but now secret causes in the administration of human affairs will never be known 'till the day of Judgement.[106]

Another aspect Rush considered concerning God's sovereignty was His absolute freedom of the will, a necessitarian position, however, which Rush frequently tried to reconcile with a belief in man's free agency.[107] But as noted in the discussion of Rush's materialism and determinism, he just as frequently, under the influence of his theory of "animal life," denied free will in the human species. If bodily and mental life originated from sensory impressions, it followed that the operation of the human will depended on such impressions. If animal matter contained no "inherent principle of life," it followed that the will had no self-determining power either. Thus only God contained self-existence and free will; he alone was the stimulus to life and thought.[108]

[106] Ibid., pp. 227-228, 1792. J. B. von Helmont (1577-1644), Belgian physician and mystic, believed each physiological process was guided by a special archaeus or spirit. In his Pleura furens (fulminating pleurisy), he argued that acidity in the archaeus caused pleurisy (Ibid., pp. 227-228 n. 39). Rush's materialistic rejection of any form of independent life in matter rendered such views as Helmont's unacceptable to him.

[107] See especially "Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-30, in Riley, p. 94.

[108] "Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 178. See also "1792-1813," p. 229, ca. Aug. 22, 1793. For a detailed examination of Rush's thinking on free will and necessity, see section iii on Rush's materialism, and section iv on Rush's necessitarian views, in Chapter II.

Rush's belief in God's providential power over all Creation, including the mental and physical existence of the human species, then, was an important corollary of his concept of absolute sovereignty. His conviction that the physiological explanation of life corroborated a belief in God's omnipotent power was another example of his use of science to support traditional theological views. The doctrine of animal life, averred Rush, by exalting ideas of God and humbling views of man, "does homage to the Supreme Being, as the governor of the universe. . . ."[109]

Rush's concept of God, however, was not merely that of a sovereign Deity of justice and power but also a Deity of unlimited goodness, benevolence, and perfection. Rush assimilated the Arminian view of God as a merciful father toward all Creation without discarding the orthodox Calvinistic assessment of God's attributes. God was "the Parent of the Universe and the source and center of all perfection and happiness," "the impartial Father of the whole human race," whose supreme attribute was an "almighty Goodness which will finally subdue all things to itself and render the Atonement effectual to the salvation of all mankind."[110]

[109] Ibid., p. 178.

[110] Jeremy Belknap, July 13, 1789, Letters, I, 521; John Seward, Dec. 28, 1796, Letters, II, 783; Belknap, Aug. 25, 1790, Letters, I, 571.

It was not surprising that, under the influence of 18th-century science, Rush turned to nature for proof of God's goodness and perfection. While not rejecting Biblical authority, he considered the efficient "economy" of nature as a significant demonstration of the Creator's perfection and benevolence. Thus, like many Jeffersonians, he constantly utilized evidence from natural philosophy and natural history to support his beliefs about God. The fact that "some of the stimuli which produce animal life, are derived from the moral, and physical evils of our world" proved that God was good, for "from beholding these instruments of death thus converted by divine skill into the means of life, we are led to believe goodness to be the supreme attribute of the Deity, and that it will appear finally to predominate in all his works."[111]

Rush constantly stressed the fitness of all things in nature as related to man; this economy of nature, he felt, bore witness to the perfect wisdom and benevolence of its Creator. In infants, observed Rush, "so powerfully do light and sound act upon them, that the author of nature has kindly defended their eyes and ears from an excess of their impressions by imperfect vision, and hearing, for several weeks after birth."[112] Likewise, God prepared man for death by diminishing a fear of it in old age; this was

[111]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 179.

[112]Ibid., p. 152.

"a wise law in the animal economy, and worthy of being classed with those laws which accommodate the body and mind of man to all the natural evils, to which, in the common order of things, they are necessarily exposed."[113]

The economy of God's plan for man was evident, Rush maintained, by the fact man was made dependent upon animals so that he would be motivated to preserve them. The many similarities between human and veterinary medicine further proved this harmony of life processes. Whether feeding or slaughtering cattle, man unknowingly increased life, for even his dietary need for meat led to greater numbers of living cattle. "By thus multiplying their numbers," concluded Rush, "we multiply life, sensation, and enjoyment."[114] The "natural outlets" of human life through wars, fevers, accidents, and old age also demonstrated the economy of nature, for otherwise an excess of the human species might destroy the balance of nature.[115]

Rush's medical profession provided him with numerous instances of the aptness of God's economy. The necessity

[113]"On Old Age," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 352.

[114]"On Hippocrates," Sixteen Introductory Lectures (1811), pp. 296, 298, 311; Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson (New York, 1948),pp. 50, 175, 262 n. 23.

[115]"Natural History of Medicine Among the Indians," Medical Inquiries and Observations, 4th ed. (Philadelphia, 1815), I, 66ff.; Boorstin, The Lost World of Thomas Jefferson, p. 175, 280 n. 4.

of exercise to maintain life, Rush declared, integrated man with all life processes in the economy of nature. All parts of the creation--man, brute animals, inanimate nature--were in constant motion or activity; "unless this were the case," he stressed, "they would soon be unfit for the purposes they were designed, to serve in the economy of nature."[116] He could see no reason why God had not provided, somewhere on the globe, a remedy for every disease. "From the affinity established by the Creator between evil and its antidotes, in other parts of his works, I am disposed to believe no remedy will ever be effectual in any general disease, that is not cheap, and that cannot easily be made universal."[117] The Author of Nature, he observed, also "had a design in making medicines unpalatable. Had they been more agreeable to the taste, they would long ago have yielded to the unbounded appetites of man, and by becoming articles of diet or condiments, have lost their efficacy in diseases."[118]

[116]"Sermon on Exercise," 1772, Selected Writings, p. 371. Thus Rush provided physiological arguments for the Puritan injunction against indolence.

[117]Proofs of the Origin of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and Kensington, by Academy of Medicine of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1798), p. 42; Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen, 1746-1813 (Philadelphia, 1934), p. 208. "To every natural evil, the Author of Nature has kindly prepared an antidote. Pestilential fevers furnish no exception to this remark" (Medical Inquiries and Observations, IV, 138-139; Boorstin, p. 263 n. 25).

[118]"Duties of a Physician," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 312. See also Jefferson, July 10, 1791, Letters, I, 594.

Thus the visible Creation, thought Rush, verified his belief in God's benevolence and perfection. In analyzing the nature of God's goodness, he stressed its creative fecundity, unity, permanence, and efficiency. The qualities of permanence and efficiency, he believed, were inherent in the idea of God's perfection. "What has been, will be, and there is nothing new under the sun."[119] If efficiency characterized the Creator's plan of the universe, then, nothing had been wasted and all things had their purpose: ". . . I believe the Creator of human souls has in infinite wisdom made no means without an end, and made nothing in vain. . . ."[120] The special aptitude children had for religious knowledge, declared Rush, illustrated the fact that "God creates all his means to suit all his ends. There must of course be a fitness between the human mind, and the truths which are essential to its happiness."[121] Benevolent acts of reform "must all be finally effectual," he contended, "for they all flow from the great Author of goodness, who implants no principles of action in man in vain."[122]

[119]Jeremy Belknap, May 6, 1788, Letters, I, 461. Everything exists in "the eternal mind," Rush observed. There is nothing truly new in actions, any more than in truths under the sun" ("Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts, Ridgway MS., p. 28; Riley, p. 94).

[120]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 544.

[121]"The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 118.

[122]Richard Price, June 2, 1787, Letters, I, 419. Most

God also exhibited variety and unity simultaneously in His Creation. "A few simple elementary bodies," observed Rush, "compose all the matter of the universe, and yet how infinitely are they combined in the various forms and substances which they assume in the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms."[123] In vain did man try to comprehend God's various modes of existence in nature, "that attribute of the Deity which seems to have delighted in variety in all his works."[124] Yet behind this diversity lay unity; the Creator, Rush stated, acted with "unity and

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18th-century philosophers rejected the idea of the extinction of a species on the grounds that such a view impugned the perfection of God's creation. Rush, however, seems to have considered the possibility at least. Boorstin notes that Rush in Sixteen Introductory Lectures, p. 311, hints that if man failed to protect domestic animals, their species might become "extinct" (Boorstin, p. 262 n. 23). Rush wrote Jefferson in 1797 that "The animals whose stupendous remains we now and then pick up in our country were once probably the tyrants of our forests and have perhaps been extirpated by a confederacy and insurrection of beasts of less force individually than themselves" (Jefferson, Feb. 4, 1797, Letters, II, 785). In a letter to Jefferson in 1811, after praising Adam Clarke's qualifications for Biblical scholarship, Rush quoted Clarke's argument in his commentary on the Bible for the extinction of mammoths and added, "I shall make no remarks upon this quotation" (Jefferson, Feb. 1, 1811, Letters, II, 79). See David Hosack, Sept. 25, 1812, Letters, II, 1163; "1792-1813," p. 231, July 3, 1794. On the Jeffersonians' interest in vertebrate paleontology, see Boorstin, pp. 36-37, 225 n. 9, 256-257 n. 10; George G. Simpson, "The Beginnings of Vertebrate Paleontology in North America," American Philosophical Society, Procs., LXXXVI (1942-1943), 130-188.

[123]"Observations on Government," 1777, Selected Writings, p. 60.

[124]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 208; "Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 172.

system in all his works."[125] "The infinity of effects from similar causes . . . in the works of the Creator," he suggested, seemed to demonstrate that "they had all been made after one pattern."[126]

If theologians too partially stressed either God's sovereignty or his goodness, they also tended to emphasize one part of the Trinity to the detriment of the others. "Some Sects honour the Father, some the Son, and others the holy Ghost, only, or supremely."[127] In contrast, Rush accepted the Trinity on faith--"We believe without attempting to explain the Mystery of the Trinity."[128]

To support his belief in Christ's divinity, he used Biblical, logical, and natural evidence:

> I believe in the doctrine of the atonement, not only because it is clearly revealed in the Old and New Testaments, but because it is agreeable to nature, and reason. Life is the product of death, throughout every part of the animal creation. Reason likewise establishes the necessity of the atonement. . . .[129]

Rush also appealed to religious mystery. "Why believe Three

[125]"The Progress of Medicine," 1801, Selected Writings, p. 236.

[126]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 175. For a discussion of the "glorious Oneness" of God in terms of time, see "Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-30; in Riley, p. 94.

[127]"1792-1813," p. 226, July 25, 1792.

[128]Ibid., p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811.

[129]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, pp. 43-44.

in One," he asked, "and not believe the derived and the independent life of our Saviour, His being raised from the grave by his Father, and being the Author of His own resurrection. . . . They all appear to be true, though opposed to each other. They are like the Trinity--mysteries intelligible only, perhaps to the Creator."[130] A study of history helped to support the concept of Christ's divinity too. Though the place of man's fall was unknown, Rush reasoned, "it is pleasing to reflect" that the place of man's redemption through Christ was known and therefore monuments "bear witness to the truth of the history of his Crucifixion."[131] He also found indirect evidence for believing in Christ as the Son of God in his doctrine of "animal life"--another example of his frequent use of science to buttress religious doctrines:

> The view that has been given of the dependent state of man for the blessing of life, leads us to contemplate with very opposite and inexpressible feelings, the sublime idea which is given of the Deity in the scriptures, as possessing life "within himself." This divine prerogative has never been imparted but to one being, and that is, the Son of God. This appears from the following declaration. "For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life within himself." To his plenitude of independent life, we are to ascribe his being called the "life of the world," "the prince of life," and "life" itself, in the New Testament. These divine epithets which are very properly, founded upon the manner of our Saviour's existence, exalt him infinitely above simple humanity,

[130]"1792-1813," p. 340, Aug. 14, 1811.

[131]Ibid., p. 293, July 28, 1810.

and establish his divine nature upon the basis of reason, as well as revelation.[132]

Rush made few observations concerning the nature of the Holy Spirit--as might be expected in view of his philosophical and biological materialism. Though he frequently referred to this aspect of the Trinity, he apparently considered its function only once--when he recorded his thoughts on the origin of evil, in his journal in 1791. Viewing evil as the absence of moral good, and sin as a weakness destroyed by strength, Rush observed that when Christ's goodness, "in the form of power and love," filled the space occupied by sin, "it is conveyed into the human mind by means of the holy Spirit. This Spirit expels nothing. It only restores strength to weakness and order to disorder. . . ."[133]

Rush apparently did not consider the concept of the Holy Spirit in terms of his materialism. Since he believed the human "soul" as having material existence, we might conclude that he considered "spirit" a form of matter too, yet when he argued for the immortality of the material soul, he acknowledged the existence of spirit by comparing it to matter.[134]

[132]"Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 179. Rush quotes John V: 26.

[133]"Commonplace Book, 1789-1791," Autobiography, p. 193, ca. May 9, 1791.

[134]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 191. "Matter is in its own nature as immortal as spirit" (Ibid.). See Chapter II, section iii, for Rush's argument that the materiality of the soul did not threaten a belief in its immortality.

Rush's convictions concerning human nature and the Deity, then, remained fundamentally those of Calvinism--original sin depraved the human species and God's power and justice was absolute--but under the influence of rationalistic liberalism, he modified his views of these concepts--man retained a spark of goodness and the Creator's infinite goodness nurtured it. In explicating his religious creed composed of Calvinistic and Arminian tenets, Rush, of course, did not discard the traditional methods of Biblical authority and logic; nevertheless, motivated by his belief that science and theology mutually reinforced one another, he constantly tested his convictions against the principles of natural history and medicine. The truths of Christian revelation and those of science, Rush hoped, would validate one another.[135]

[135]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 123.

VI. Rush's Doctrine of Universal Salvation

Rush's belief in the principle of universal salvation formed the essential core of his religious thought. "The Deity," he urged, "must be represented as the impartial Father of the whole human race, the Atonement must be extended and made effectual to the happiness of all, and evil of course be ultimately annihilated."[136] "Everything shows the Unity of the human race," wrote Rush in his journal,

> and that they are included in one Salvation. Children suffer for the iniquities of their fathers, subjects for the sins of their kings, and vice versa, and all mankind for the sin of Adam. Blessings are communicated to man by man to beget universal love. Thus the Jews conveyed the Gospel to the gentiles, and the elect will finally when they become kings and priests to God convey the Gospel to that part of the human race which perish in this world.[137]

Rush was convinced that the doctrine of universalism was a "polar" truth leading to all other truths. "A belief in God's universal love to all his creatures, and that he will finally restore all those of them that are miserable to happiness," he asserted, "is a polar truth. It leads to truths upon all subjects, more especially upon the subject of government. It establishes the equality of mankind--it abolishes the punishment of death for any crime--and converts

[136]John Seward, Dec. 28, 1796, Letters, II, 783.

[137]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 343.

jails into houses of repentance and reformation."[138]

Yet without giving the tenet of universal salvation serious attention, divines had assailed it as a leading cause of disorder and licentiousness. Such a charge, Rush felt, was completely without foundation; it "might with more reason be made against . . . the present doctrines of all the Protestant churches." Had not men "who believe in endless punishment" perpetrated every conceivable crime against God, man, and society?[139]

If "universality [was] expressed by all the earth, all nations, all families, all individuals, all flesh" (as Hartley's Observations on Man and Pistorius' additions demonstrated), then a belief in the universality of redemption made good sense to Rush.[140] Even the universality of human depravity verified the truth of final restitution--as Rush rather ingeniously explained to Adams:

> I have often contemplated that passion in mankind to concentrate all their homage and admiration in one man in all the revolutions which advance knowledge or happiness. . . . I have thought at last that I had discovered in this weakness in human nature the high destiny of the Soul even in its ruins. Does it not prove that it was created originally to concenter all its love and adoration in One Supreme Being, and that all its obligations are due to that Being only? Is it not the counter-passion of the love of fame, which is only a misplaced desire after immortal life and happiness? Are not all our follies and vices the counterfeits of virtues? Are not

[138]Jeremy Belknap, June 6, 1791, Letters, I, 584.

[139]Ibid., p. 583.

[140]"1792-1813," Autobiography, pp. 342, 342 n. 40.

> the love of pleasure, of power, of wealth, of activity, and of rest nothing but passions and propensities which have corresponding objects held out to them by revelation, but which are at present under a false direction? A belief that this is the case has often afforded me great pleasure, for as I observe folly and vice to be universal, and as I believe the Creator of human souls has in infinite wisdom made no means without an end, and made nothing in vain, so I have derived from contemplating the weak and corrupt passions and desires that have been mentioned a satisfactory argument in favor of the tendency and ultimate termination of all human beings in complete and eternal happiness in every respect suited to their present tempers, but under a new and different direction.[141]

Such natural and logical evidence for believing in universalism helped, but the doctrines of restitution after just punishment and Christ's universal atonement confirmed Rush in his belief in universal salvation.

The orthodox doctrine of endless punishment was an anathema to Rush; by utilizing evidence from natural science, logic, and the Bible, he attacked it frequently in his essays, journals, and letters. Why did ministers, he asked, complain that nothing they said convinced their congregations of the truth of eternal punishment? Because "nothing in the nature of man accords with it."[142] ". . . the idea of only one Soul being lost either by a defect of mercy to redeem, or of power to save after redemption," declared Rush, "is pregnant with despair, and contrary

[141]Adams, April 13, 1790, Letters, I, 544.

[142]"1792-1813," p. 343.

to the universal command and obligation to believe the Gospel."[143] "It is said the first view or reading of the Scriptures," he wrote in his commonplace book,

> leads to endless misery. So the first view of the Solar system leads to a belief that the sun revolves around the earth. Reason refutes both. If time is tedious in proportion to suffering, then the pains of hell may well [be] said to be eternal, though only temporal. The Marquis of Mirabeau, who died of an acute and painful disease in his bowels, said in his last hours "he endured in a moment the pangs of a thousand years."[144]

Though God exacted just retribution for the sinfulness of mankind, He did not eternally punish sinners. "Sin is not an infinite evil," Rush reasoned. "Other-[wise] the infinite merits of the Saviour could not cancel it--for two infinities, like two right lines, could never overtake each other."[145] Hell became for Rush therefore a kind of purgatory, a fiery purification of sin. "As arsenic and other poisons cure physical diseases, so may not fire and brimstone cure moral evil."[146] The Bible as well as science, he believed,

[143] Ibid., p. 226, July 1792.

[144] Ibid., p. 344. "God reveals some truths to our senses and to our first perceptions, but many errors are conveyed into the mind through both, which are to be corrected only by reason. Thus the Sun appears to our eyes to revolve around the earth. Astronomy corrects this error. Endless punishment is obvious to first perception or apprehension in the Bible. Reason corrects this error, from comparing the whole tenor of Scripture together" (Ibid., p. 336, Dec. 21, 1809).

[145] Ibid., p. 344.

[146] Ibid., p. 342.

supported the idea that punishment was designed to purify the sinner in preparation for restitution. If the ashes of sacrifices were holy, as Leviticus VI: 21 indicated, it seemed reasonable to Rush that "the bodies of the wicked after burning and purification will still be holy to the Lord. May not burnt offerings typify the application of the Gospel after the burning of the bodies of the wicked?"[147]

The refutation of the doctrine of endless punishment helped to establish his belief in the eventual restoration of all mankind, but the principle of the universality of the atonement, Rush maintained, proved beyond doubt the truth of universalism. He refused to accept any version of Christ's atonement "unless it . . . renders his death as well as his life necessary for the restoration of mankind. . . ."[148] "All," he emphasized, "are included in Christ's purchase."[149] The divine commission of the Son of God was to expiate fully every sin, to purchase by his death forgiveness of all sins. "The demands of the divine law which made the shedding of blood necessary for the remission of sin," he asserted, was "clearly revealed in the Old and New Testaments" and was "agreeable to nature, and reason"; it was "a sublime illustration of the perfection of the divine government, and the love of the Supreme Being

[147] Ibid., p. 345.

[148] Jefferson, Aug. 29, 1804, Letters, II, 886.

[149] "1792-1813," p. 343.

to his intelligent creatures."[150]

To Rush it seemed reasonable that "if Christ died for all, as Mr. Wesley always taught, it will soon appear a necessary consequence that all shall be saved."[151] Hence he rested his belief in universal salvation and final restitution "wholly upon the Calvanistical [sic] account . . . of the person, power, goodness, mercy, and other divine attributes of the Saviour of the World."[152] He believed a detailed examination of the Scriptures inevitably supported such a conclusion:

> There have been many disputes about those words of our Saviour in which he says he was ignorant of the "time" of the Day of Judgement. Attempts have been made to divide his humanity and divinity and to ascribe this ignorance to the former only. But may we not suppose that when He assumed the fallen nature of man he assumed everything that belonged to that nature, that is, not only sin, poverty, shame, pain, and death, but ignorance, and many other consequences of the fall. In this way only could he "bear all our infirmities," of which ignorance is a material one. This explanation of the above words should encrease our obligations to the Saviour. He disrobed himself not only of the glory which he had with his Father, before the world was, not only of his riches and power but of a part of his Omniscience, in order to complete the great work of man's redemption.[153]

[150]"On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), pp. 43-44. See also Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[151]Elhanan Winchester, Nov. 12, Letters, I, 611.

[152]Richard Price, June 2, 1787, Letters, I, 419.

[153]"1792-1813," pp. 336-337, Dec. 21, 1809. The Biblical references in the passage are to Matthew XXIV: 36 and VIII: 17.

Natural as well as Scriptural arguments demonstrated that the atonement applied to all. "We were made for redemption," Rush declared. "The principles of it are inherent, natural, and born with us." What were demands for the satisfaction of injuries and the honoring of military heroism and death but "perverted exercises of the mind intended to recognize the Atonement and to admire it?" It was natural, he noted, for obligation to produce intense hostility. Thus Satan hated Christ intensely because of "his having been redeemed by him" and cursed the whole human race because of "their all being included in the purchase of the Saviour, and of course his property."[154]

Firmly grounded on a conviction of Christ's universal atonement and on a rejection of the doctrine of endless punishment, Rush's universalism reconciled his Calvinistic and Arminian beliefs.[155] God's sovereign justice punished men for personal and inherited sin, but his infinite love and mercy finally restored them--as Rush expressed it, "God is undivided. His mercy must be coextensive with his justice--both [are] infinite."[156] Partial redemption of the elect prepared the way for a universal redemption of the damned.[157] Thus, Rush concluded, ". . . may we not

[154] Ibid., p. 344.

[155] "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 163.

[156] "1792-1813," p. 344.

[157] ". . . the elect will finally when they become kings and priests to God convey the Gospel to that part of

expect all vestiges and records and consequences of the fall and sin of man will be swallowed up and annihilated by the life and death of the Saviour of the world?"[158]

Furthermore, universalism reconciled the contrarieties of liberty and necessity; both were necessary to God's plan of final restoration and universal salvation. As he explained it in his lecture on "Liberty and Necessity,"

> Is it not absurd to talk of past or future when we speak of the knowledge of the Deity? Can anything be past or future to a being who exists from eternity to eternity? Are not past, present, and future to Him, one eternal now? Is not time a finite idea only, and past and future knowable only to finite beings? May not the moral actions of men then have appeared as complete to the Deity at the creation as the material world? I see the objects of a plain before me as distinctly as if I were near it. My view of it has no influence on its form or distance; the same probably occurs to the Deity with respect to pre-existing actions. . . . They all have an existence in the eternal mind. . . . So far for necessity. But this is compatable with the most perfect liberty. . . . Nor does this idea destroy man's responsibility. He is still free. His liberty is essential to the necessity--otherwise his action would have no moral nature and could not be the object of pardon, and for this purpose alone evil existed. It must be free to be a crime, and crimes existed, not for the display of vindictive justice in endless punishment, but for the display of love in endless and universal happiness. This removes all the fears and difficulties about moral necessity. It was necessary that man should fall--it was likewise necessary that he should be free, or he could not have fallen. Liberty and necessity are, therefore, both true, and both

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the human race which perish in this world" (Ibid., p. 343). Thus, "Both partial and universal redemption are true" (Ibid., p. 345). See also Ibid., p. 339, Aug. 14, 1811.

[158]Ibid., p. 293, July 28, 1810.

> necessary to advance in due consistency all the glorious attributes of God.[159]

Thus, the doctrine of universal salvation became the catalyst that fused Rush's disparate religious beliefs--the oneness of God and the variety of His Creation, determinism and free will, God's justice and His mercy, the fall of man and Christ's redemption, the evil of the universe and God's infinite goodness--into a unified Christian faith.[160]

[159]"Liberty and Necessity," Letters and Thoughts (Ridgway MS.), pp. 28-30; I. Woodbridge Riley, "Benjamin Rush as Materialist and Realist," Bulletin of Johns Hopkins Hospital, XVIII (1907), 94.

[160]On Rush's belief in immortality, see Jeremy Belknap, Jan. 5, 1791, Letters, I, 574; Horatio Gates, Sept. 3, 1797, Letters, II, 789; "1792-1813," p. 272, Sept. 8, 1807. Rush believed that both the body and the soul were immortal ("Lectures on Animal Life," 1799, Selected Writings, p. 180; "1792-1813," pp. 227-228, Aug. 27, 1792). For his argument that the idea of soul as material did not threaten a belief in its immortality, see "The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 191; notes of Rush's Lectures taken by Purnell (Medical and Chirurgical Faculty Library, Baltimore), p. 71, in Riley, p. 91.

VII. The Relation Between Science and the Bible in Rush's Theology

Rush was confident that his use of the evidence of science to explain and defend religious doctrine proved the essential harmony between science and theology, even the possibility of a science of religion. The fact that physiology and medical science shed valuable light on the meaning of the Bible supported such hopes for a religious science. The theologian, as Rush tried to demonstrate, could re-interpret the mysteries, miracles, and prophecies of the Bible by analyzing the Scriptures according to the principles of science. Yet the fact that Rush preferred Scriptural revelation to natural and rejected a religion of nature revealed the paradox of an underlying discord between science and religion in his thought. Though he labored to reconcile the Calvinistic heritage and 18th-century scientific discoveries, he finally rejected natural revelation and grounded his faith in the Bible, concluding that it provided the only trustworthy foundation for political, moral, and religious systems. All other foundations, including science, proved to be quicksand.[161]

Better knowledge of the laws of nature, Rush believed,

[161]See especially, Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919; Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171.

helped to clarify some parts of "the Christian revelation."[162] "Natural history, and astronomy," said Rush, ". . . are calculated to discover the meaning and establish the truth of many parts of the Scriptures."[163] He told Jefferson, therefore, that Adam Clarke "professes uncommon qualifications" for a Biblical commentary because among other things he was a naturalist, a chemist, and an anatomist.[164]

Hence, a pet project of Rush's was a commentary on the Bible that would utilize the facts and principles of medical and natural history to their fullest possibilities. He reported to Jeremy Belknap in 1791 the general outline of his proposed study:

> I am now engaged in composing a small work which I shall entitle "The application of the principles of medicine to the explanation of sundry events, and particularly of the diseases and remedies mentioned in the Old and New Testament." In this work I shall tread on new ground, but my opinions will all tend to establish the truth and excellency of the Scriptures. One part of this essay will aid our testimonies against the use of spirits. The labor of Egypt was supported by no other cordial than by leeks and onions, and the wars of the Jews only by wine, raisins, and cakes of figs, exclusive of common aliment.[165]

He told John Dickinson in 1796 that his attempt to explain

[162]"The Influence of Physical Causes upon the Moral Faculty," 1786, The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 211.

[163]Ashbel Green, May 22, 1807, Letters, II, 946.

[164]Jefferson, Feb. 1, 1811, Letters, II, 1079.

[165]Belknap, April 5, 1791, Letters, I, 579.

various passages in the Bible "by the principles of medicine and the laws of animal economy" not only provided "many new arguments in favor of Christianity" but rendered "infidelity, at least among physicians, as much a mark of ignorance as it is of impiety or immorality."[166]

Though he never published his long-projected work, he used some of his accumulated notes in other essays.[167] In his 1774 oration on Indian medicine, he explained the relationship between the diseases of the Jews in the Old Testament and Christ's miracles:

> The principal employments of the Jews, like those of the Romans in their simple ages, consisted in war and husbandry. Their diet was plain, consisting chiefly of vegetables. Their only remedies were plasters and ointments; which were calculated for those diseases which are produced by accidents. In proportion as they receded from their simple customs, we find artificial diseases prevail among them. The leprosy made its appearance in their journey through the wilderness. King Asa's pains in his feet, were probably brought on by a fit of the gout. Saul and Nebuchadnezzar were afflicted with a melancholy. In the time of our Saviour, we find an account of all those diseases in Judea, which mark the declension of a people; such as, the palsy, epilepsy, mania, blindness, hemorrhagia uterina, &c. It is unnecessary to suppose, that they were let loose at this juncture, on purpose to give our Saviour an opportunity of making them the chief subject of his miracles. They had been produced from natural causes, by the gradual depravity of their manners. It is remarkable, that our Saviour chose those artificial

[166]Dickinson, Feb. 16, 1796, Letters, II, 770.

[167]Some of the notes collected for the book are in the Rush MSS, Notebooks, vol. 1 (Letters, I, 580 n. 3).

> diseases for the subject of his miracles, in preference to natural diseases. The efforts of nature, and the operation of medicines, are too slow and uncertain in these cases to detract in the least from the validity of the miracle. He cured Peter's mother-in-law, it is true, of a fever; but to shew that the cure was miraculous, the sacred historian adds, (contrary to what is common after a fever) "that she arose immediately and ministered unto them."[168]

In his essay on the moral faculty, Rush examined a number of Biblical events to illustrate the influence of physical causes on moral behavior.[169] Old Testament prohibitions of diet, he explained, were actually based on the influence of diet on the moral sense. Thus in the Bible, "Fullness of bread" was a predisposing cause of the vices of the Cities of the Plain. "The fasts so often inculcated among the Jews were intended to lessen the incentives to vice; for pride, cruelty, and sensuality, are as much the natural consequences of luxury, as apoplexies and palsies." The kind as well as amount of food also influenced morals;

> hence we find the moral diseases that have been mentioned are most frequently the offspring of animal food. The prophet Isaiah seems to have been sensible of this, when he ascribes such salutary effects to a temperate diet. "Butter and honey shall he eat," says he, "that he may know to refuse the evil, and to choose the good."

The Old Testament, Rush observed, also gave ample evidence

[168]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," 1774, Selected Writings, p. 286 n.

[169]"Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, pp. 193, 197, 201, 205.

of an awareness that cleanliness was "a physical means of promoting virtue":

> The writings of Moses have been called, by military men, the best "orderly book" in the world. In every part of them we find cleanliness inculcated with as much zeal, as if it was part of the moral, instead of the Levitical law. Now, it is well-known, that the principal design of every precept and rite of the ceremonial parts of the Jewish religion, was to prevent vice, and to promote virtue. All writers upon the leprosy, take notice of its connection with a certain vice. To this disease gross animal food, particularly swine's flesh, and a dirty skin, have been thought to be predisposing causes--hence the reason, probably, why pork was forbidden, and why ablutions of the body and limbs were so frequently inculcated by the Jewish law.

Because bodily pain affected the moral powers of the mind, it was one of the remedies used in the Scriptures to extirpate vice and promote morality. The Bible connected this and other physical causes such as solitude, music, and diet with moral precepts because they were a means of reforming vice. Thus a vegetable diet and silence cured Nebuchadnezzar of his pride, and David's harp cured Saul of his evil spirit. Such an association between physiology and morals, declared Rush, explained St. Paul's assertion that "I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be cast-away."

Rush's example, in the essay, of the influence of association on morality was perhaps his most ingenious use of medical science to illuminate Biblical events. "It is

by calling in this principle only," he explained,

> that we can account for the conduct of Moses, in grinding the golden calf into a powder, and afterwards dissolving it (probably by means of hepar sulphuris,) in water, and compelling the children of Israel to drink of it, as a punishment for their idolatry. This mixture is bitter and nauseating in the highest degree. An inclination to idolatry, therefore, could not be felt, without being associated with the remembrance of this disagreeable mixture, and of course being rejected, with equal abhorrence.

Rush was convinced, therefore, that medicine, physiology, and natural history were of incalculable value in elucidating the meaning of the Bible.[170] But the fact remained Rush ultimately preferred the revelation of the Bible to the revelation of nature--as his analysis of the kinds of revelation in his "Defence of the Use of the Bible as a School Book" made clear.[171] Comparing Scriptural revelation with the revelation of the moral faculty

[170]For other examples of his belief that many scientific discoveries accorded with the events of the Bible, see the discussion based on "The Bible as a School Book," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 122-123, in section ii of this chapter. Rush, of course, used logic and reason as well as scientific criticism in interpreting the Bible. See his general discussion on understanding the Bible which includes a logical and rational analysis of the Book of Matthew on the issue of celibacy, in Mary Stockton, Sept. 7, 1788, Letters, I, 483-486. See also "On Punishing Murder by Death," 1792, Selected Writings, pp. 37-39, for a logical argument against capital punishment based on the Scriptures. "There is no opinion so absurd or impious," Rush warned, "that may not be supported by solitary texts of scripture. To collect the sense of the bible upon any subject, we must be governed by its whole spirit and tenor" (Ibid., p. 46).

[171]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 126-127.

and of the Creation, he declared that the Bible was the most reliable source of the word of God. Acknowledging a belief "in an internal revelation, or a moral principle, which God has implanted in the heart of every man, as the precursor of his final dominion over the whole human race," he questioned the value of any concentrated effort to explore how much it accorded with the Bible. Although a close scrutiny of the principles of action in man might discover most of the Christian doctrines revealed in the Bible, "who is equal to such an enquiry?" Mankind's "natural indolence, or laborious employments" did not especially suit him for the task. The clear truth of the Bible, moreover, rendered such an onerous chore unnecessary:

> The internal revelation of the gospel may be compared to the straight line which is made through a wilderness by the assistance of a compass, to a distant country, which few are able to discover, while the Bible resembles a public road to the same country, which is wide, plain, and easily found. "And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the way of holiness. The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein."

Rush would not degrade "the Revelation which God has made of himself to man in the works of creation" either, but its light was dim compared to the Bible:

> But the knowledge of God obtained from this source, is obscure and feeble in its operation, compared with that which is derived from the Bible. The visible creation speaks of the Deity in hieroglyphics, while the Bible describes all his attributes and perfections in such plain, and familiar language that "he who runs may read."

Even at the most liberal period of his career--on the eve of the Revolution--Rush maintained the supremacy of the Scriptures. "Natural and revealed Religion," he wrote in 1773, "always speak the same things, although the latter delivers its precepts with a louder, and more distinct voice than the former."[172]

Rush's antagonism toward natural religion, especially deism, also revealed the underlying tension between science and religion in his thought. "Reject natural religion," he noted in his commonplace book in 1807. "We should have been not Pagans, but Brutes without Revelation, and as to the arts of civilization, we should have known as little as dogs or horses. All our capacities would have been dormant."[173] He praised Ashbel Green, acting president of The College of New Jersey, for denying the existence of a "Religion of Nature" in an address to the college. "It is high time to chase the Deists from that ground."[174]

Rush rejected natural religion largely because it was based solely on natural revelation--a source of God's word that he found to be "obscure and feeble in its operation" in comparison with Biblical revelation. The real danger in rejecting Biblical authority in favor of the

[172]"On Slave-Keeping," 1773, Selected Writings, p. 7.

[173]"Commonplace Book, 1792-1813," Autobiography, ed. George W. Corner (Princeton, 1948), p. 272, Sept. 8, 1807.

[174]Green, Dec. 9, 1802, Letters, II, 854.

revelation of nature, Rush felt, was that it opened the door to atheism. "It would seem that natural knowledge instead of leading men to God . . . led them from him. Geology and Botany have both assailed Revelation. . . ."[175] "An infidel to be consistent," he wrote in his journal in 1809, "should be an atheist, for the works of nature exhibit more mysteries and contradictions than the Word of God."[176]

He also criticized the deists because they "have unduly multiplied the objects of reason. . . ." The deists' exclusive reliance upon reason threatened to create social and political chaos--as he explained to Noah Webster,

> But alas! my friend, I fear all our attempts to produce political happiness by the solitary influence of human reason will be as fruitless as the search for the philosopher's stone. It seems to be reserved to Christianity alone to produce universal, moral, political, and physical happiness. Reason produces, it is true, great and popular truths, but it affords motives too feeble to induce mankind to act agreeable to them. Christianity unfolds the same truths and accompanies them with motives, agreeable, powerful, and irresistible. I anticipate nothing but suffering to the human race while the present systems of paganism, deism, and

[175]"1792-1813," Autobiography, p. 338, Feb. 5, 1810. "The greatest number of infidels and atheists are to be found among those men who see most of the wisdom of God in his works, viz. Philosophers. . ." (Ibid., p. 334, ca. 1809). Rush used the word infidel to designate a non-Christian, especially one who rejected the divine revelation of the Bible.

[176]Ibid., p. 335, ca. 1809.

> atheism prevail in the world. New England may escape the storm which impends our globe, but if she does, it will only be by adhering to the religious principles and moral habits of the first settlers of that country.[177]

Rush charged that the deists actually had borrowed their principles from Christianity. "All that is just in principle or conduct in a Deist," he declared, "is taken from his previous knowledge of Christian Religion or the influence of Christian company. A man not educated under such circumstances would know nothing of what is good."[178] As he explained in his proposal to use the Bible in public schools,

> . . . many men have rejected the prejudices derived from the Bible: but I believe no man ever did so, without having been made wiser or better, by the early operation of these prejudices upon his mind. Every just principle that is to be found in the writings of Voltaire, is borrowed from the Bible: and the morality of the Deists, which has been so much admired and praised, is, I believe, in most cases, the effect of habits, produced by early instruction in the principles of Christianity.[179]

"All natural Religion," concluded Rush, "as it is falsely called, is the result of scattered rays of Revelation.

[177]Noah Webster, July 20, 1798, Letters, II, 799.

[178]"1792-1813," p. 334, ca. 1809.

[179]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 118. "The boasted morality of the deists is, I believe, in most cases, the offspring of habits, produced originally by the principles and precepts of christianity" ("Moral Faculty," 1786, Selected Writings, p. 202).

It is the moonlight of Christianity."[180]

Rush condemned natural religion, then, because it rejected the authority of the Scriptures. The Bible, as Rush defined it, was the "written revelation of the will of God, to the children of men." It contained "more truths than any other book in the world: so true is the testimony that it bears of God in his works of creation, providence, and redemption, that it is called truth itself, by way of pre-eminence above things that are simply

[180]"1792-1813," p. 335, ca. 1809. For positive comments on deism, see Ibid., p. 229, Aug. 22, 1793; "Punishing," 1792, Selected Writings, p. 46. Though Rush played a decisive role in the origination of Paine's Common Sense, he reacted negatively to Paine's deistic Age of Reason (John Dickinson, Feb. 16, 1796, Letters, II, 770; Adams, Sept. 16, 1808, Letters, II, 978; "1792-1813," p. 323, June 8, 1809; James Cheetham, Jan. 6, 1810, Letters, II, 1033-1034). In 1809, Rush wrote James Cheetham, author of a hostile biography of Paine, that he had not seen Paine "when he passed through Philadelphia a few years ago. His principles avowed in his Age of Reason were so offensive to me that I did not wish to renew my intercourse with him" (Cheetham, July 17, 1809, Letters, II, 1009). Rush found Jefferson's "Christian" deism more acceptable. See "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 152; Jefferson, Aug. 22, 1800, Letters, II, 820; Jefferson, May 5, 1803, Letters, II, 864. Rush's antagonism toward natural religion should not obscure the fact that he was usually tolerant of various religions and denominations (See "On the Different Species of Mania," 1787, Selected Writings, p. 217; "On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, pp. 394-395; "Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic," Selected Writings, p. 88: "Travels Through Life," Autobiography, p. 79; Adams, April 5, 1800, Letters, II, 962-963; Matthew Carey, Nov. 24, 1808, Letters, II, 989). Rush believed that republican governments should encourage religious freedom and individualism (See "On Manners," 1769, Selected Writings, p. 381; Jefferson, Oct. 6, 1800, Letters, II, 824-825; Charles Nisbet, April 17, 1784, I, 474; Adams, June 15, 1791, Letters, I, 517; Adams, April 5, 1808, Letters, II, 962-963).

true."[181] He wrote in his autobiography that he never once "entertained a doubt of the divine origin of the Bible."[182] He was confident therefore that mankind erred in religion, "only because 'we do not know the scriptures'":

> Immense truths, I believe, are concealed in them. The time, I have no doubt, will come, when. . . . those truths which have escaped our notice, or, if discovered, have been thought to be opposed to each other, or to be inconsistent with themselves, will then like the stones of Solomon's temple, be found so exactly to accord with each other, that they shall be cemented without noise or force, into one simple and sublime system of religion.[183]

If man erred in religion by not relying on the Bible, he erred in human affairs for the same reason. The Jews, Rush pointed out, "flourished as a nation, in proportion as they honored and read the books of Moses. . . ." During the wicked reign of Manassah, Moses' law was neglected and misery plagued the Jewish nation. But when Josiah, finding it in the rubbish of the temple, brought it into general use again, "national virtue and prosperity" returned. But the benefits of the Bible, Rush argued, were not confined solely to the Hebrew nations. Since the reformation, "instruction in the principles of Christianity, by means of the Bible," seemed to have caused "the moral and enlightened character" of such countries as Germany

[181]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, pp. 119, 121.

[182]"Travels Through Life," p. 31.

[183]"The Bible," 1791, Selected Writings, p. 122.

and Scotland as well as the New England states.[184]

It seemed axiomatic to Rush, then, that "everything good in man, and all his knowledge of God and a future state, are derived wholly from scattered and traditional rays of the successful revelations recorded in the Bible. Without them, men would have been elevated above beasts of prey only in wickedness and misery."[185] All of his other schemes for happiness in society failing, Rush turned to the Bible. In the end, he rejected science and reason, the "infallible" method of the Enlightenment, as a means of perfecting society; only Biblical truth furnished a reliable basis for religious, moral, and political institutions:

> By renouncing the Bible, philosophers swing from their moorings upon all moral subjects. Our Saviour in speaking of it calls it "Truth" in the abstract. It is the only correct map of the human heart that ever has been published. It contains a faithful representation of all its follies, vices, and crimes. All systems of religion, morals, and government not founded upon it must perish, and how consoling the thought--it will not only survive the wreck of these systems but the world itself.[186]

[184] Ibid., pp. 120-121.

[185] Ashbel Green, Dec. 9, 1802, Letters, II, 854.

[186] Adams, Jan. 23, 1807, Letters, II, 936.

VIII. Conclusion

Rush's theology, then, was a synthesis of orthodox and liberal principles fused together by the doctrine of universal salvation. In his explication of these religious beliefs, science played a significant role. In several instances, medical science and natural history gave Rush telling arguments for orthodox tenets, such as original sin, and liberal tenets, such as God's infinite goodness and absolute sovereignty. He based his solution to the problem of evil largely on his unitary theory of disease and interpreted many Biblical passages in terms of medical science. All of these tended to support his conviction that science was a secure foundation for religion, and that he could create a science of religion.

Yet through the years Rush gradually lost faith in science as a means to moral and religious perfection. Though it produced fruitful commentary on his religious convictions, Rush became increasingly aware that it too frequently led men away from rather than toward religious faith. The religion of nature, spawned by a dependence on natural revelation, undermined Biblical authority. In the end he grounded Christianity completely on faith--on a fideism that grew out of his rejection of reason, constant observation of examples of human depravity and folly, and skepticism over human efforts to achieve progress.

Finally convinced that the gospel dispensation, in its promise of universal salvation, provided the only path to temporal and future happiness, he based his religious faith solely on the Bible.

When Rush, in a letter to Adams in 1811, reviewed the failure of his humanitarian efforts in politics, education, medicine, penology, abolition, and temperance, he suggested his disillusion with progress by comparing himself to Jeremiah:

> . . . I think there is a character in the Old Testament which . . . accords with mine. It is that of the prophet Jeremiah. I shall give it to you in his own words. "Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me, a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have neither lent on usury nor have men lent me on usury, yet every one of them doth curse me."[187]

Religion gave Rush the only consolation left for reform--"It is only by experiencing the malice and rage of man that we can comprehend what is meant by having fellowship with the sufferings of the Son of God."[188]

[187]Adams, Dec. 26, 1811, Letters, II, 1115-1116. Rush quoted Jeremiah XV: 10.

[188]John Dickinson, Oct. 11, 1797, Letters, II, 793.

CONCLUSION

In this study of Rush's political, philosophical, and religious thought, we have stressed the intellectual interplay in its development between the traditions of science and religion. Utilizing the tools of the Enlightenment--that is, reason, the scientific method, and the natural laws of God's Creation--Rush worked to perfect society, and to create a science of government, morality, religion, and the mind. He sincerely believed that science and Christianity could combine into one harmonious system of thought--as he expressed it to Charles Nisbet:

> Here everything is in a plastic state. Here the benefactor of mankind may realize all his schemes for promoting human happiness. Human nature here . . . yields to reason, justice, and common sense. Come, sir, and spread the influence of science and religion among us. America seems destined by heaven to exhibit to the world the perfection which the mind of man is capable of receiving from the combined operation of liberty, learning, and the gospel upon it.[1]

Yet ironically, in view of this effusive definition of the American mission, the Puritan strain in Rush's religious thought, with its pessimistic views of human nature and the possibility of social betterment, failed to harmonize with the utopian aims of his scientific beliefs. The two strains of thought refused to adhere, and eventually became mutually repellent. The tension between them not only accounted for much of the

[1]Nisbet, Dec. 5, 1783, Letters, I, 316.

inconsistency in his thought but also his rejection of science in favor of theology as the more trustworthy basis for happiness.

Before concluding this study we should review briefly the main ideas in Rush's political, philosophical, and religious thought, tracing in particular both the discord and the harmony that the interaction of religion and science created in his thought.

Rush based his political thought on two fundamental principles--that sound governmental theory recognized the inherent depravity of the human species and included necessary measures for its control, and that good government reflected scientific principles in its organization, by reproducing in its structure the Newtonian pattern for proper stability and permanence and by encouraging the growth and health of the human species. The measure of good government was the physical and mental health of its citizens; a flourishing population always accompanied sound social and political institutions. According to Rush, then, political science became a branch of natural history and physiology. Using these criteria, he rejected military despotism, simple democracy, and monarchy because they failed to incorporate the necessary provisions to control human depravity and failed to apply scientific principles, creating chaos instead of order, producing mental and physical illness instead of health. But a

republican government succeeded where the others failed, since its complex system of checks and balances and separation of powers in order to secure simple principles imitated the balance and harmony of the universe, controlled political depravity, and encouraged health and longevity in the species.

Rush's basic philosophy was Jeffersonian in that it emphasized empiricism, associationism, and materialism--concepts largely derived from his physiological theory of life. These views, Rush contended, were not only compatible with Christian theology, but helped to substantiate it. Certain aspects of his philosophical thought, however, refused to adhere to Jeffersonian thought. Influenced by Calvinism, he retained deterministic, necessitarian views in his thinking, in contrast to the Jeffersonians who stressed free will, and he eventually rejected a physiology of morals in favor of morality based on Christianity. Moreover, he alternated between monistic materialism and a Christian dualism of mind and matter, of liberty and necessity. He also qualified his empiricism, by indicating a preference of theory to empiricism in medicine and by occasionally speculating on romantic concepts, such as the existence of an intuitive faculty in the mind. Most significantly, he gradually developed a skeptical fideism that rejected rationalism, denied progress through human efforts, repudiated the scientific emphasis of the Enlightenment, and envisioned a millennium brought about

by Christian faith alone.

Rush composed his religious creed of many orthodox and heterodox principles, reconciled and unified by the doctrine of universal salvation and final restitution. Convinced that science and religion were compatible, Rush, especially before 1800, utilized natural history and medical theory to explain religious doctrines and Scriptural texts. But his vision of creating a natural history of religion and morals faded with the passing years, even though scientific analysis seemed to illuminate many of his religious precepts and principles. Disillusioned by a sense of frustration and failure in his humanitarian activities, he gradually moved away from a reliance upon science and reason toward an attitude of religious fideism, finally grounding morality and Christianity solely on a faith in the Bible.

Threading through his religious, philosophical, and political thought, then, was the interaction of science and religion--now reinforcing each other, now working at cross purposes in his thinking. It accounted for the anomalies, contradictions, and inconsistencies in his thought, for his tendency to offset one assertion with another: necessity with liberty, monistic materialism with a dualism of mind and matter, Calvinism with Arminianism, faith in scientific rationalism with skeptical fideism. Sometimes he synthesized opposites, as in his doctrine of

universalism and his republican political philosophy, but frequently incongruity and dissonance remained, especially in his philosophical beliefs.

The clash between the scientific and religious polarities of Rush's mind was a manifestation of the conflict between two intellectual traditions in American thought--the Enlightenment with its emphasis on rationalism, its belief in human progress, its conviction of human benevolence and perfectibility, its passionate desire for social improvement, and its faith in the natural right of equality; and the Puritan heritage with its conviction of the inherent depravity of the human species, its pessimistic rejection of progress and perfection, its suspicion of democracy and equality, its reliance on God's providential rule of the universe, and its anti-rationalism. Complicating the intellectual milieu of the late Revolutionary Age in America was the rise of romantic thought with its rejection of empiricism and reason and its reliance on intuitive knowledge, following closely the impact of the Age of Reason. Out of this welter of conflicting ideas Rush eclectically built his philosophy. To consider the Jeffersonian side of his mind exclusively, therefore, is to understand only part of his thought--the part which, ironically, he finally repudiated in favor of religious fideism. A full comprehension of his political, philosophical, and religious thought requires an understanding

of all the facets of his complex mind.

Perhaps the greatest paradox to come out of this study of Rush's thought is the irony of the humanitarian reformer who believed that society could be improved moving toward skepticism, losing faith in reason, science, and man, finally believing that only God could better society. Rush began his public career confident that science held the key to America's future greatness. In an oration before the American Philosophical Society in 1744, he envisioned a "mighty fabric of science, which like a well built arch, can only rest upon the whole of its materials, completely furnished from the treasures of this unexplored quarter of the globe." If government would actively support the scientific schemes of the society, he declared,

> What may we not expect from this harmony between the sciences and government! Methinks I see canals cut, rivers once impassible rendered navigable, bridges erected, and roads improved, to facilitate the exportation of grain. I see the banks of our rivers vying in fruitfulness with the banks of the river of Egypt. I behold our farmers, nobles; our merchants princes. But I forbear--Imagination cannot swell with the subject.[2]

The physician's responsibility as a reformer, Rush contended, was to utilize medical science in order to eradicate misery from the globe:

> Human misery of every kind is evidently on the decline. Happiness, like truth, is a unit.

[2]"Medicine Among the Indians of North America," The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York, 1947), p. 291.

> While the world, from the progress of intellectual, moral and political truth, is becoming a more safe and agreeable abode for man, the votaries of medicine should not be idle. All the doors and windows of the temple of nature have been thrown open by the convulsions of the late American Revolution. This is the time, therefore, to press upon her altars. We have already drawn from them discoveries in morals, philosophy, and government, all of which have human happiness for their object. Let us preserve the unity of truth and happiness, by drawing from the same source, in the present critical moment, a knowledge of antidotes to those diseases which are supposed to be incurable.[3]

In this mission, religion and science would march together: "The extension of the Kingdom of Christ and of the empire of reason and science in our country," Rush told Charles Nisbet in 1784, "are the only principles that have actuated my conduct."[4]

But after 1800 Rush gradually dropped the theme of the rise and progress of science in America. In 1806 he admitted to Adams that "Civilization, science, and commerce have long ago failed in their attempts to improve mankind"; he now placed his "only hope for suffering and depressed humanity" on a "belief in a new and divine order of things which . . . will be introduced into our world by the influence of the gospel upon individuals and nations."[5]

[3]"Duties of a Physician," 1789, Selected Writings, p. 321.

[4]Nisbet, Aug. 27, 1784, Letters, I, 339. See also Jeremy Belknap, May 5, 1790, Letters, I, 566.

[5]Adams, June 10, 1806, Letters, II, 919.

"I have been educated in the unbelief," he confessed to Adams in 1812, "of the philosopher's stone, of an elixir that shall restore the antediluvian age, of a panacea of a single medicine that shall cure all diseases, of the omnipotence of human reason, and of the perfectibility of governments composed of imperfect materials. . . ."[6] When Rush recommended to Adams in 1811 that he leave a testimony to the citizens of America on the subject of political and social happiness, he stressed that "in such a performance you may lay the foundation of national happiness only in religion," not in a physiology of morals.[7] Religion, not science, had become Rush's single hope for the continued existence of the Republic.

[6]Adams, Dec. 19, 1812, Letters, II, 1171. In his Diseases of the Mind, Rush listed among the causes of mental derangement the intense study of the sciences and such "imaginary objects of knowledge" as "the means of discovering perpetual motion; of converting the base metals into gold; of prolonging life to the antediluvian age; of producing perfect order and happiness in morals and government, by the operations of human reason. . ." (Diseases of the Mind, Philadelphia, 1812, p. 36, in Nathan G. Goodman, Benjamin Rush, Physician and Citizen, 1746-1813, Philadelphia, 1934, p. 261.

[7]Adams, Aug. 20, 1811, Letters, II, 1095-1096.

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